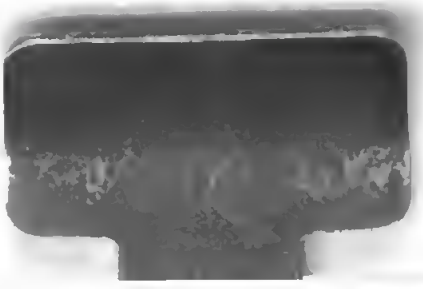
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22 f.

BRITISH NOVELISTS AND THEIR STYLES.

BRITISH NOVELISTS

AND THEIR STYLES:

BEING A CRITICAL SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF BRITISH PROSE FICTION.

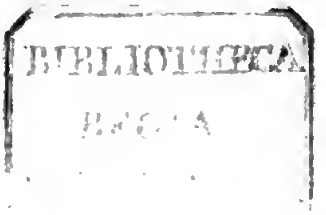
BY DAVID MASSON, M.A.

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON;
AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOHN MILTON," ETC.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE substance of the following pages was delivered, in the form of Lectures, to the members of the Philosophical Institution of Edinburgh in the months of March and April, 1858. Passages necessarily omitted in the delivery are here restored; a few passages spoken from notes are expanded from recollection; and there are also some additions, especially towards the end. By these changes the Discourses are made to exceed by much the ordinary limits of Lectures. I have, however, retained the name of "Lectures" by way of title,—partly because nearly all the matter, as it stands, was actually prepared to be spoken; and partly because the name may serve to account for anything in the manner of treatment or in the style that might not be considered so fitting in other forms of composition. With respect to one of the Lectures—the third—it might even be obliging if the reader were to remember specially that it was prepared for an Edinburgh audience.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LONDON,
June, 1859.

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LECTURE I.

ON THE NOVEL AS A FORM OF LITERATURE, AND ON EARLY BRITISH PROSE-FICTION.

If we adopt the common division of Literature, into History, Philosophical Literature, and Poetry or the Literature of Imagination, then the Novel, or Prose-Fiction, as the name itself indicates, belongs to the department of Poetry. It is poetry inasmuch as it consists of matter of imagination; but it differs from what is ordinarily called Poetry, inasmuch as the vehicle is not verse, but prose. If we wish to define farther the place of the Novel in the general department to which it is thus assigned, we shall do so best by referring to the subdivisions of Poetry itself. There are said to be three kinds of Poetry—the Lyric, the Narrative or Epic, and the Dramatic. This division is usually made with respect to Metrical Poetry; but it holds also with respect to the Prose Literature of Imagination. The prose counterpart to Lyric Poetry or Song is Oratory, or, at

least, a conccivable species of oratory, which might be called the Prose Ode, or Rhapsody. The prose counterpart to the metrical Drama is, of course, the Drama in prose. There thus remains, as the prose counterpart to Narrative Poetry, the Romance or Novel. The Novel, at its highest, is a prose Epic; and the capabilities of the Novel, as a form of literature, are the capabilities of Narrative Poetry universally, excepting in as far as the use of prose, instead of verse, may involve necessary differenccs.

This association of the Novel with the narrative kind of metrical Poetry, this theory of the Novel as being, at its highest, the prose counterpart of the Epic, will be found, I believe, not unimportant. Apart from any hope it may give as to the Novel of the future, it is not without value in reference to our judgment of the novels of the past. No one seems recently to have had a clearer perception of this than Baron Bunsen. "Every romance," he says in his preface to one of the English translations of the popular German novel *Debit and Credit*, "is intended or ought to be a new Iliad or Odyssey." Very naturally, by those who take a more common view of the subject, this statement may be received as a philosophic extravagance. What! a Circulating Library novel and the Iliad; one of our thousand

and one stories of society in Mayfair and Homer's old story of the wanderings of Ulysses and Penelope's troubles with her suitors? But, as Baron Bunsen is demonstrably right in theory, so he is able to verify the theory by an appeal to experience. "If we pass in review," he says, "the romances of "the last three centuries, we shall find that those "only have arrested the attention of more than one "or two generations which have satisfied this (*i. e.* "the epic) requirement." In fact, any unwillingness that there may be to admit his statement will be found to arise from the circumstance that people, in testing it, think only of the great epics, but think indiscriminately of all novels, small as well as great. When we think of the Iliad or the Odyssey, or of the "Jerusalem Delivered," or of "Paradise Lost," it is certainly difficult to remember a prose romance, or at most more than one or two prose romances, that could for a moment be seriously put in comparison with such works of epic genius. But, on the other hand, if there are specimens of the metrical epic with which we can hardly dare to compare the best prose romances extant, there are as certainly hundreds of performances, ranking in the same general class of poetry as these epics, which we should as little dare to compare, in respect of genius,

with some of our best novels. Take, as an instance, *Don Quixote*. If we hesitate about elevating this great work quite to the altitude of the three or four metrical Epics which the world prefers to all others, we have no hesitation whatever in pronouncing it a work of far higher, and even of more truly poetic genius, than many works of narrative verse which have yet deservedly earned for their authors no mean reputation—the metrical stories of Dryden, for example, and the Fables and Tales of Lafontaine. In short, if we think only of good novels in connexion with good narrative poems, throwing equally out of sight what is inferior in both departments, the association of the Novel with the Epic will not seem so much amiss. At all events, in tracing the history of the Novel, there will be some advantage in recollecting the association. The phases through which the Novel has passed will be found to be not unlike those through which Narrative Poetry has passed; and, in any particular country, the Prose-Fiction of a period will be found to exhibit the characteristics seen also in the contemporary Narrative Poetry.

Perhaps, however, in studying more closely the relation thus suggested between the two kinds of literature, it is better to use the general phrase,

"Narrative Poetry," instead of the special word, "Epic." For, though Epic Poetry is a term synonymous at times with Narrative Poetry, there are many varieties of Narrative Poetry which we distinguish from what we call peculiarly the Epic. There is the metrical Fable, as in Gay and Lafontaine; there is the light amorous or humorous story in verse, as in Lafontaine again and parts of Prior; there is the Ballad; there is the long romantic or pathetic tale, or the comic tale of real life, as in Chaucer's "Canterbury Pilgrimage" and the rest of his poetry; there is the satirical burlesque or mock-heroic, as in Butler's "Hudibras;" there is the pastoral or idyllic phantasy, as in the poetry of William Browne or the "Princess" of Tennyson; and there is the sustained heroic and allegoric romance, as Spenser's "Faery Queene." These, and still other forms of metrical narrative that could be named, we distinguish from the Epic proper, notwithstanding that in some of them—as in the tales of Chaucer, the idyls of Tennyson, and Spenser's great allegoric romance—we have specimens of poetic genius which we should hardly subordinate to the poems actually called Epics. Now, so it is in Prose Fiction. Though Prose Fiction corresponds to Narrative Poetry, the correspondence is that of two wholes which severally

consist of corresponding parts. For each variety of Narrative Poetry there is, or there might be, a corresponding variety of Prose Fiction. We have the Fable in prose; we have the light amorous or humorous story in prose; the short prose legend answers to the Ballad; of romantic or comic prose tales of considerable length, but not reaching the dimensions of the Novel, most modern languages are full; and we have also the prose burlesque, the prose pastoral or idyl, and the prose allegoric romance. Subtracting these, we have, or we might have, as the variety of Prose Fiction answering specially to the Epic proper, that serious and elaborate kind of composition, styled more expressly the Novel, of which worthy specimens are so rare, and in which, as in the Epic, the aim is to give, as Baron Bunsen says, "a poetic representation of a course of events consistent with the highest laws of moral government, whether it delineate the general history of a people [the Iliad as type] or narrate the fortunes of a chosen hero [the Odyssey as type]." Bearing all this in mind—bearing in mind that Narrative Poetry itself consists of numerous varieties, and that Prose Fiction contains, or may contain, varieties as numerous and exactly corresponding—we may repeat our former assertion in a somewhat modified shape,

and say that the capabilities of any form of Prose Fiction are the same as those of the equivalent form of Narrative Poetry, whatever that may be, excepting in as far as the substitution of prose for verse implies necessary abatements or differences.

Verse or Prose, then—the matter of importance lies in that alternative. What can Verse do in narrative fiction that Prose can not; and, on the other hand, are there any compensating respects, in which, in the same business, Prose has the advantage of Verse?

In the interest of these questions, I might first point out that it is not so easy as it seems to say what is merely prose, and what is decidedly verse. Where the printer helps us, by dividing and arranging lines according to their metrical structure, and by leaving wide margins and intervals, we recognise verse at once; but beyond that point, and *in* among densely-packed prose itself, there may be snatches, and even considerable passages, which are good unrhymed verse to the ear, and have all the effect of such, though, for lack of the printer's help, the fact is not perceived, and though the author himself, not writing with a view to certain mechanical arrangements, may hardly have intended it. Conventionally, indeed, as soon as we get a little way

clear out of rhyme, we draw a broad mechanical line, and then at haphazard call all on one side of this line verse, and all on the other side prose; although in nature and in all natural effect the transition may be far more gradual, and much of what we call prose is really verse, acting as such on the mind, though latent and unaccredited.

Setting aside this consideration, however, and accepting the ordinary conventional distinction between verse and what *we* call prose, but which the ancients more significantly called *oratio soluta*, or "loosened speech"—a distinction which would be perceptible, although the penman or the printer were to neglect those mechanical arrangements which indicate it, in the main, so conveniently—let us proceed with our questions.

What can Verse do, or what has Verse been found to do, in the business of narrative fiction, which Prose cannot do, or has not been found to do so easily? I cannot profess here to exhaust this question; but a few hints may serve our immediate purpose.

Versification itself is an art, mastery in which wins independent admiration, and is a source of independent intellectual pleasure; and, *cæteris paribus*, a work delivered over to the human race in verse has a greater chance, on this account, of being

preserved, treated as a classic, and read again and again, or at least spoken of as if it were. Verse embalms and conserves the contained meaning, whatever may be its intrinsic merit. When, however, a writer who has attained the art of verse by following a constitutional tendency to it, or who has recourse to it in any particular instance from a knowledge of its efficacy, does take the trouble of throwing a fictitious narrative into the form of verse, it is almost obvious that he sets out with a predetermination that the matter shall be of a rich or serious kind, about the very best in its order that he is able to produce; and also that, in consequence of the slower rate at which he must proceed, and the greater care and ingenuity which he must use, the matter, even without such predetermination, will tend to elevate and refine itself, when it is once in flow. Hence, in general, though not universally, high, serious, and very heroic themes of poetic interest beg, and almost claim, by right of fitness and precedent, to be invested with the garb of verse; leaving to prose such as are of plainer or rougher, or less sublime and impassioned character.

But, beyond this, and apart from mere custom, as determining the choice of the vehicle beforehand, Verse, from its own nature as Verse, exercises an

influence in the origination or genesis of the matter that shall seek conveyance through it,—*forms* that matter, ere it leaves the mind that invents it, according to subtle laws of affinity with its own mechanism and its conscious powers. Verse welcomes certain kinds of matter, and proclaims its adaptation for them; it rejects other kinds of matter, wishes to be excused from them, is intolerant of them if forced upon it, and resents the intrusion by the uncouthness of the result. To speak briefly, the kind of matter for which Verse has an affection and for which it is fitted, is that which is in its nature general, permanent, fundamental, ever interesting, least variable by time or by place. The primary human emotions and relations, and the acts that spring from them and illustrate them; the permanent facts of nature and of life; the everlasting generalities of human thought and human aspiration and difficulty—these are what lay claim to be sung or chanted, while the rest may be simply *said*. By a law of opposites, Verse, the most highly *conditioned*, or, as we say, the most artificial form of speech, lays claim to matter the least conditioned in fact, and the most radically incorporate with the primitive basis of nature. The scene of every poem must, of course, be laid in some place and in some

time; every poem must carry in it historic elements and references to contemporaneous particulars which are interesting to posterity; the costume and the circumstance must be Greek, or Roman, or Mediæval, or English, or Spanish, according to the nativity and education of the writer; nor is there any great narrative poem which has not a tinge in it of local and national colour, and is not full of social minutiæ. It is nevertheless true that Verse, narrative or other, seeks the general under the particular, the constant under the varying. Moving as it does on wings, it may descry all and take cognizance of all, but it can rest but here and there on the tips and pinnacles of things. In Tennyson's narrative phantasy of the "Princess," we have local and temporary colour to some extent—the English lawn in the prologue, and the college of "violet-hooded doctors," and their feminine lectures on modern geology in the tale; but how elemental and air-hung the whole story in its beauty, as compared with what would probably have been the result had a similar phantasy been attempted in prose!

It is but an extension of this remark to say, that there is an inherent fitness in Verse for what is highly ideal or poetic intellectually, and for what is deeply impassioned. It is from no mere accident,

no mere deference to custom, that, when the imagination exercises itself most purely and poetically, it submits itself to the apparent restriction, but real stimulus of verse, and that when the heart is powerfully touched in its deepest chords, the utterance rules itself by metre and rhyme. Perhaps, however, it is less in the general conception and conduct of a poetical story, than in what may be called the subsidiary imagery and invention, the poetical filling-up, that this necessity appears. There is hardly any theme or fancy so magnificent but that the outline might be given in prose; and in our prose fictions we have instances of schemes fit for noble poems; but what Prose hesitates to undertake as confidently as Verse, is to sustain a story from beginning to end, all the parts of which shall be little excursions in the ideal, independently beautiful and impressive, and never betraying the flagging of the fantastic wing. The "argument," as it is called, of the "Princess," or even of "Paradise Lost," might have had a fine rendering in prose; but, in the slow conduct of that argument through all its parts, what a loss of subsidiary fancy, of poetic episode, of wondrously subtle intellectual combinations, of flashing images, of rich and luscious word-pictures, of rolling harmonies of sound and ear-bewitching cadences!

What would have been substituted might have been very good, and might for other purposes have answered better; but the aggregate would have been such as to alter the character of the work, and make it less uniformly ideal.

In what I have said in behalf of Verse, I have virtually involved much that ought to go to the other side of the account. If, in the business of narrative fiction, Prose has its drawbacks, it has, in consequence, certain compensations.

When the Poet, in Goethe's prelude to "Faust," is dilating to the Theatre-manager and the Merry-Andrew on the grandeur of his craft, and on the necessity of neglecting the common and the ephemeral, and of striving after that which is permanent and will interest posterity, the Merry-Andrew very pertinently breaks in:—

> "Would of Posterity I heard less mention!
> Suppose Posterity had *my* attention,
> Who'd make contemporary fun?"

Now, "contemporary fun" is a very important interest, and Mr. Merryman's remark is capable of considerable expansion. Although, when the theme or matter is high and serious, it may be worth a writer's trouble to call in the aid of Verse, so as

to give it the greater chance of conservation, there is abundance of very rich and hearty matter in the mind of every time for which there is no necessity for such preserving labour. There are hundreds of notions which the world may be all the better for having infused into it through the medium of its oetic sense, hundreds of circumstances in every time to which contemporary attention may be usefully called; for the inculcation of which notions, and the indication of which circumstances, it may yet be wholly unnecessary to arouse from her repose always the most venerable of the Muses. In the great region of the comic, in particular, it may be questioned whether Prose has not the wider range, and the more searching, furious, and door-breaking licence. In Chaucer, it is true, and in hundreds of other writers of metrical fiction, we have exquisite wit and humour; and from the fact that these writers have made verse the vehicle of their fun, their fun has the chance of being more than contemporary. But what it may have gained in one way, it may have lost in another. On comparing our best specimens of humorous fiction in metre with corresponding works of humour in prose, I think this will be found to be the case. Riotous humour, the humour that provokes laughter at the

time, and again, days afterwards, when the ludicrous fancy recurs to the memory; that mad kind of humour, in especial, which amounts to inspired zanyism, and whirls earth and heaven together, as if Puck were lord of both; little of this, since the days of Aristophanes, has Verse been disposed to undertake. If any one apparition might here start up to contradict me, it might be that of Burns. But that, allowing to the full all that the recollection of Burns's humorous poems might suggest, I still have in view something different, will be obvious, I think, if we recollect simultaneously some of the humorous dialogues in Wilson's *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. We might agree, I think, to challenge any master of verse to render, word for word, and idea for idea, without the abatement of something, and the substitution of something different, one of the harangues of Wilson's Ettrick Shepherd.

Let it not be thought, however, that, in the business of fiction it is solely in the element of humour that Prose lays claim to powers indemnifying it for its concessions to Verse. As it has a freedom in the element of the humorous greater in some respects than belongs to Verse, so in the whole region of the historical, and whatever borders on that region, it moves with the more intricate and insinuating gait.

Walking, as it does, on *terra firma*, and not merely poised on ascending and descending wings, it can push its way through the thick and miscellany of things, pass from generalities to particulars, and from particulars back to generalities, and come into contact with social reality at a myriad points in succession. It is Mr. Hallam, I think, who remarks that, with all the wealth of social allusion contained in the works of the poets, and especially of the comic poets, they do not transmit to us so rich a detritus of minutiæ respecting the laws, the customs, and the whole economy of the defunct life of past generations, as do the prose novels of such ages as have produced any. Other historians have made the same remark, and have even, in writing of particular periods, declared that they would have been willing, as far as their immediate purpose was concerned, to exchange a whole library of the poets of those periods for one tolerably good novel. This as regards posthumous historic use; but it is evident that there is another and a distinct use in the contemporary representations of novelists. If Prose can concern itself more intimately than Verse with what is variable in time and place, then a prose-fiction can take a more powerful hold of those eddies of current fact and incident, as distinct from the

deeper and steadier undercourse of things, which, in the language of those who look more to the eddies than to the undercurrent, constitute a social "crisis." There never was an age yet that did not think itself to be in a "crisis," and that had not probably good reasons for thinking so; but, seeing how rarely the "crisis" comes off, and how perpetually it is postponed, it is perhaps well that there should be such a form of literature as the Novel, to engross in sufficiently poetic shape the humours that are successively disappointed, leaving for the Epic the care of a longer accumulation, and the work of a wider survey.

This leads us to the perception of a third faculty of Prose in the business of fiction, identical perhaps with that just referred to, but capable of being separately named. As Prose can be more intimate and minute in its historical connexions than Verse, so for the interfusion of doctrine or exposition with fiction, Prose has superior facilities. While Verse will assume and utter the great articles of human faith; and while even, after a fashion of its own, it will admit of speculation, and the evolution of fresh maxim; yet for all that partakes of the nature of continuous reasoning or explication, and especially for efficient action in existing social controversy, and for

the administration of correctives to existing opinion, Prose is better adapted. Hence, although this is not the duty of fiction, yet, to the extent to which a prose fiction can legitimately outdo a metrical narrative in this direction, it may be said to give a more various representation of passing life, and to be, for not a few purposes, the preferable form of literary art.

I have sometimes thought that much light might be cast on this whole question of the relative capabilities of Prose and Verse in fiction, by a study of the incessant shiftings of the Elizabethan dramatists, and especially of Shakespeare, from verse to prose, and back again from prose to verse, in the course of the same drama, or even of the same dramatic act or scene. The study would apply mainly to the dramatic kind of fiction, but it would help also as between metrical narrative and the prose tale or novel. In the main, I believe, such an investigation would corroborate what I have said. When Falstaff has to talk (and what talk it is!) does not Shakespeare make the preparation by going into prose? And what is the talk of his matchless clowns, but an alternation between broken prose and the wildest and most wayward lyric; as if Shakespeare's very idea of a clown was that of

a being through whom nature blew her extreme shreds of deepest sense and of keenest pathos, with nothing connecting or intermediate? In this habit or instinct of Shakespeare—and the practice is seen not in Falstaff and the clowns alone, but in all the similar characters—we seem to have a verification of what has been alleged as to the capabilities of Prose in the region of humour. The plays afford verifications also of what has been alleged as to the capabilities of Prose in the regions of the historical and the doctrinal. It is remarkable, however, that it is not only on occasions of any of these three kinds, that Shakespeare passes into prose out of his accustomed verse, but that, as if bent on leaving his testimony to the powers of Prose, where these were least expected and least believed in, he has often committed to prose matter so splendid, so ideal, so poetical, so ghastly, that, but that the thing is done, and done by him, theory would have called it a hopeless treachery to the rights of Verse. Take, as an instance, Hamlet's speech about himself:—

"I have of late (but wherefore I know not) lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire—why, it appeareth

nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is Man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form, and moving, how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me; no, nor woman neither."

With such passages in view, and remembering also that, as Verse was the rule with Shakespeare, and Prose only the exception, he is likely to have informed us only what Prose could peculiarly do, and not of *all* that it could do, need we be surprised at that note of Coleridge's, on the "wonderfulness of Prose," in which, fancying the impression for the first time of a piece of nobly modulated prose on the minds of a crowd hitherto accustomed only to verse, he protests that the effect of such a disclosure of the powers of *oratio soluta*, or "loosened speech," must have been like the revelation of a new agency, the bursting of a brave ship into a new and boundless sea. Need we shrink, either, from anticipating for Prose triumphs even in Verse's own regions of the imaginative and the impassioned, such as yet have hardly been dreamt of? Need we shrink from supposing that, as Prose is still the younger and the invading occupant, and as already it has chased

Verse from the busy coasts, and the flat and fertile lowlands, so it may encroach farther and farther still, planting its standards along the looming line of the hills, and even in the mouths of long-withdrawing glens, till at length Verse, sacred and aboriginal Verse, shall take refuge in the remotest fastnesses of the mountains, and live, sad but unconquerable, amid the mists, the cataracts, and the peak-loving eagles?

Settle as we may this question of the relative capabilities of the Prose Fiction and the Metrical Fiction, it remains true that they are closely allied as the two forms of narrative poesy, and that there are canons of criticism common to both. Let us leave out of account the minor varieties of prose fiction, and attend only to the elaborate romance or novel.

In a prose romance or novel, as in a narrative or heroic poem, the first or main matter of interest for the critic, is the scheme, the idea, the total meaning, the aim, the impression, the subject. Is the idea great and deep, or is it small and trivial? Is the subject slight and temporary, or is it noble, large and enduring? The subjects that a poet or a novelist selects are, like those that a painter selects, alle-

gories of his entire mental state, or at least of his aspirations as they are compromised by his circumstances. What a man, left to his own freedom, chooses, out of the miscellany of things, as a theme for poetic representation, is something that strikes him, that has a meaning for him, an affinity with his character, his past experience, his education, his sentimental peculiarities, his natural or acquired mode of thinking. In all cases, therefore, the subject or theme of a poetic work is a promise for or against it. If, in a novel, the theme or idea is important,—if it is the object of the author to seize and to represent in a mimic world of ideal characters and situations the deepest peculiarities of the life of a time; or if he selects some portion of past or present social fact, and throws that into his mimic world; or if, with some distinct metaphysical meaning in his mind, he casts that into symbolic form in the actions of imaginary personages,—in any of these cases the probable value and interest of his performance may be so far guessed beforehand. Without knowing anything farther, for example, of Cervantes' great novel than that it is a story of two characters, the one a lofty but crazed Idealist and the other a sturdy Materialist, wandering in company in search of adventures over a sunny land still covered with the

wrecks of a rich civilization, and mingling with its peasants, its nobles and its gipsies—the curiosity is roused and the book seems worthy of attention. Or again, to state the matter differently, the novelist, as the creator of his mimic world, is also its providence; he makes the laws that govern it; he conducts the lines of events to their issue; he winds up all according to his judicial wisdom. It is possible, then, to see how far his laws of moral government are in accordance with those that rule the real course of things, and so, on the one hand, how deeply and with what accuracy he has studied life, and, on the other, whether, after his study, he is a loyal member of the human commonwealth, or a rebel, a cynic, a son of the wilderness. In short, the measure of the value of any work of fiction, ultimately and on the whole, is the worth of the speculation, the philosophy, on which it rests, and which has entered into the conception of it. This may be demurred to; but it will, I believe, be found to be true. No artist, I believe, will, in the end, be found to be greater as an artist than he was as a thinker. Not that he need ever have expressed his speculative conclusions, or have seemed capable of expressing them, otherwise than through the medium and in the language of his art; nor even that, while engaged

in one of his works, he need have been thoroughly conscious of the meaning he was infusing into it. At the same time, the probability is that unconsciousness on the part of an artist of the meaning of his own works is more rare than is supposed. Whatever Shakespeare can be found to have done, there is a considerable likelihood that he knew he was doing.

Next to the general conception or intention of a novel, and as the means by which that conception or intention is either successfully achieved or ends in failure, the critic attends chiefly to three things—the incidents, the scenery, and the characters.

The invention or imagination of *incident* is, at least, as important a part of the Novelist's work as it is of the work of the Narrative Poet. On this depends what is called the construction, the interest of the plot. True merit in this particular will be found to be but a detailed form of that merit which consists in the general creation of the story—the so-called "incidents" being events more or less consistent with the idea of that mimic world, whether meant as a facsimile of the real, or as an imaginary variation from it, which the author had in view from the first. On this head, therefore, I will offer but two remarks. In the first place, notions as to

what constitutes a sufficiency of this merit in a novel are likely to differ much, according to the degree of the reader's culture. Some of the greatest works of fiction would be thrown aside as wearisome by those whose appetite is for "thrilling interest;" and, on the other hand, many novels of "thrilling interest" have no interest at all for those whose tastes have been well educated. In the second place, however, it is the habit of a large class of cultivated readers to find fault too thoughtlessly, in some cases, with a certain order of incidents which lead to the "thrilling" sensation—those, namely, which have the character of so-called improbability. In novels of real life, the improbability of an incident may well be its condemnation. If, however, there may be novels of other kinds, if Prose-Fiction is to be allowed anything like the range of Narrative Poetry, there is no reason why, to the extent to which it is allowed this range, it should not have the same liberty—the liberty of purely ideal incident in a purely ideal world. If for example, we never mutter this word "improbability" in reading Keats's "Endymion," or Spenser's "Faery Queene," simply because we know that we are in a world of fantastic conditions, then, so far as we admit that Prose may make similar excursions into the realms of pure

imagination, our attachment to probability of incident must, in prose fiction also, be permitted to grow weak. As novels go, resentment of improbability of incident is a wholesome critical feeling; but, if made absolute, the rule would simply amount to this, that there should be no prose fiction whatever but the novels of real life. From this I, for one, dissent, as an illegal arrest upon the powers of Prose. But, indeed, we all dissent from any such opinion. What else but a dissent from it is the distinction we make between the Romance and the Novel? I have not hitherto recognized this distinction, nor do I care to recognize it very strictly, because, after all, it is one more of popular convenience than of invariable fitness. A Romance originally meant anything in prose or in verse written in any of the Romance languages; a Novel meant a new tale, a tale of fresh interest. It was convenient, however, seeing that the two words existed, to appropriate them to separate uses; and hence, now, when we speak of a Romance, we generally mean "a fictitious narrative, in prose or verse, the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents;" and, when we speak of a Novel, we generally mean "a fictitious narrative differing from the Romance, inasmuch as the incidents are accommodated to the

ordinary train of events and the modern state of society." If we adopt this distinction, we make the prose Romance and the Novel the two highest varieties of prose fiction, and we allow in the prose Romance a greater ideality of incident than in the Novel. In other words, where we find a certain degree of ideality of incident, we call the work a Romance.

In Novels or prose Romances, as in narrative poems, much of the interest depends on the author's power of description, *i. e.* on his faculty in the imagination of *scenery*. Much of the interest, I have said; but much of the benefit also! A remark here occurs akin to what I have just been saying. In our novels of real life we have no lack of descriptions of the ordinary places of social resort and of all their objects and circumstantials—the interior of a house in town or of a mansion in the country; a merchant's counting-house or the quadrangle of a college; a squalid city-lane or the quiet street of a village; the theatre on the night of a royal visit, or a court of justice during the trial of a great criminal; the inside of an omnibus or of a railway-carriage on its journey, or the deck or cabin of a steamer on its river or ocean voyage. All this is well; and, in proportion to the fidelity with which

such scenes are reproduced, we admire the descriptive powers of the artist. But is it not well also—in these days especially, when so many of us, cooped up in cities and chained to this part or that of the crowded machinery of complex civilization, have all but lost our acquaintance with our ancient mother earth, and hardly know even the overhanging sky, except in ribbands over streets and as giving picturesqueness to chimneys—is it not well, is it not medicinal that, as much as possible, in the pages of our novelists, as in those of our narrative poets, we should be taken away in imagination from our common social haunts, and placed in situations where Nature still exerts upon Humanity the unbroken magnetism of her inanimate bulk, soothing into peace in the quiet meadows, whispering of the unearthly in the depths of a forest, telling tales of the past in some solitary crumbling ruin, moaning her sorrow in the gusts of a moor at midnight, or dashing the eternal monotone of her many voices against a cliff-embattled shore?

It is, however, by his *characters* that a novelist is chiefly judged; and the most esteemed part of a novelist's genius is his power in the imagination of *character*. In this is included the imagination of physiognomy and corporeal appearance, as well

as the imagination of feelings, states of disposition, and modes of thought and speech. What a function of genius, whether in metrical poesy or in fiction in prose, is this of the creation of ideal beings! Already, in the very air over our heads, and in contact, nay in interfusion and connexion, with the actual world to which we belong, and which we help forward by our action, flutters there not another and invisible world of secondary origin, intellectually peopled by troops of beings that have taken wing into it, flight after flight, these three thousand years past, from the teeming brains of men and of poets? All around us, and in the very air over our heads, do there not move and bustle at this moment, and even act upon us through thought and memory, myriads of beings, born at different dates—some ages ago, and some but yesterday—forming, in their union, a great population; headed and ruled, let us say, by the Achilleses, the Ajaxes, the Œdipuses, the Antigones, the Æneases, the Tancreds, the Lears, the Hamlets, the Macbeths, the Fausts, and the Egmonts of our greater Fables, but divided also, like our own mortal world, into grades inferior to these, and more numerous and more ordinary as they descend; containing, too, as our own world does, wild and uncouth and exquisite or melancholy spirits, that shoot

from grade to grade, or circle strangely by themselves —Pantagruels and Panurges, Jaqueses and Ariels, Redgauntlets and Dirk Hatteraicks, Mignons, Meg Merrilieses and Little Nells? What are these but beings that now are, but once were not—creatures that once existed only in the minds of poets and inventors, but that, when they were fully fashioned there, were flung loose into Nature, as so many existences, to live for evermore and roam amid its vacancies? Nay, from every new romance or fiction does there not take flight a new troop of such beings to increase the number of these potent invisibles? To what may all this tend? We talk of spirits, of ghosts, of demons, as anterior to, and coeval with, human history, by virtue of a separate origin when Nature's constituents were once for all pre-arranged and rolled together in their mystic harmony! Here we have them as appended on to human history and organically developed out of it! In a metaphysical sense, these phantoms of the human imagination are things, existences, parts of the world as it is, equally with the rocks which we tread, the trees which we see and can touch, and the clouds that sail in the blue above us. May they not, then, have a function in the *real* evolution of the future?

There are other matters still which the critic is

bound to attend to, in examining prose fictions. Not to dwell on the most obvious of these—as, for example, the merit or demerit of the literary style—I will mention but one thing to be borne in mind in the criticism of a novel. This is the merit or demerit of its extra-poetical contents. A large portion of the interest of every poem or work of fiction consists in the matter which it contains in addition to the pure poetry or fiction. In Shakespeare or in Wordsworth there is much that we value besides what is properly the poetry—philosophical disquisition, for example, or luminous propositions on all subjects and sundry, or fragments of historical fact and description, introduced into the verse or the dialogue by the way, and poetical only in as far as they are put into the mouth of an imagined character, or connected with an imagined occasion. We call a work great in virtue of its pleasing or stirring us in many ways; and, whatever is the nominal form of a work, we thankfully accept all kinds of good things that can artistically be brought into it. So, in a novel, if the writer can contrive, consistently with poetic method, or even sometimes by a slight strain on that method, to give us valuable matter over and above the mere fiction or story, we ought to allow all that is so given to go to his credit. As an example of a novel

in which speculation, or critical and philosophical remark on many things, is blended in large proportion with the pure fiction, I may name Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*. The novels of Scott and the *Promessi Sposi* of Manzoni will occur to you as works in which, along with the fiction, we get valuable fragments of authentic history.

So much by way of theory of the Prose Fiction as an existing and matured form of literature; and now for the History of this form of literature, more particularly amongst ourselves.

The first and most notable fact in the history of this form of literature is its late appearance, as compared with other forms. This fact resolves itself into a still more general fact—the historical priority of Verse to Prose. In speaking of these two modes of literature, I have hitherto represented them as modes existing together, and equally available, according to the option of the writer and the nature of his task; and I have but incidentally hinted that, though coordinate now, they are not coeval. To this matter of their relative antiquity it is necessary now to attend.

That Verse is the more ancient is a fact known to all. I am not sure, however, that we are in the

habit of conceiving the fact with sufficient distinctness or with a sufficient sense of all that it includes. The fact, it seems to me, amounts to nothing less than this, that Song or rhythmical utterance was the original form of all human speech, just as the mode of thinking and feeling natural to such rhythmical utterance was the original mode of all human consciousness, or as if, risking an analogous assertion, we were to say that men originally did not walk, but danced and leaped rhythmically. At all events, the earliest literature of all kinds—History and Philosophy, as well as Poetry,—was in the form of Song. To adopt an image suggested by the old designation of Verse as *oratio vincta* or "bound speech," and of Prose, contrariwise, as *oratio soluta* or "loosened speech," we are to fancy all kinds of human thought and mental activity as originally dammed up in Song, as in a lake with steep embankments—not only poetic or imaginative thought, and feeling or emotion, but also whatever of historical record or tradition and of speculative doctrine or philosophy may be conceived to have been in existence. By a natural law, this lake overflows and bursts forward in "loosened speech,"—the stream throwing off, in its advance, first one form and then another of literature, according as human thought,

becoming less and less homogeneous, is found to demand corresponding diversity in the modes of its expression. First, History is thrown off; then Philosophical Discourse is thrown off; then practical Oratory is thrown off: Verse relieving itself thereby, first of the business of record, next of that of speculative activity, next of that of direct social and moral stimulation—except in as far as in each of these kinds of literature, thus detached out of its own body, Verse may think it right to retain a parental interest. But, even after History, Science, and Oratory are thrown off, and Verse has retained to itself only Lyric Poetry, Narrative Poetry, and Dramatic Poetry, it does not retain these in homogeneous form and within the same channel. Not only do differences evolve themselves in the metrical forms of the three kinds of Poetry—the Drama loosening itself into a lax metre nearly approaching Prose, the Epic or Narrative reserving somewhat more of metrical law, and the Lyric remaining locked up in the strictest metrical bonds of all; but each of these varieties of metrical Poesy shows a tendency to detach from itself a corresponding variety of actual Prose. Theoretically we should have expected, perhaps, that the order of detachment would have been as follows,—first, the Prose Drama; secondly, the Fictitious Prose

Narrative; and lastly, and with greatest difficulty, the Prose Ode or Lyric. In fact, however, when we make our examination in ancient literature, we find the Fictitious Prose Narrative making its appearance before any extant specimen of the Prose Drama. And yet, at how late a period in the whole history of the Classical Literature this appearance takes place! The Homeric period of the Grecian Epic was over; the period of Pindar and the Greek Lyric Muse was over; the glorious dramatic era of Æschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes, was over; Greece had had her great historians in Herodotus and Thucydides, her great philosophic period in Plato and Aristotle, her noblest period of prose oratory in Demosthenes and his contemporaries,—all this was past and gone, and Greek Literature was in its dregs, before any specimens of the Prose Fiction, corresponding to what we should now call a Romance or a Novel, were produced in the Greek tongue.

If we except Xenophon, as the author of the *Cyropædia*, and one or two others, whose names have been preserved, though their works have perished, the first Greek writers of prose fiction were Heliodorus, Achilles Tatius, and Longus—all of whom lived after the third century of our era. In

Latin, then the other language of the civilized world, the Prose Fiction had previously made its appearance in the *Satyricon* of Petronius Arbiter, and the *Golden Ass* of Apuleius—both of whom lived in the second century, after the list of the greater Roman classics had been closed. When we look into the works themselves, we can see that, by their nature, they belong to an age when the polytheistic system of society was in its decrepitude. They are, most of them, stories of the adventures of lovers, carried away by pirates or otherwise separated by fate—thrown from city to city of the Mediterranean coasts, in each of which they see strange sights of sorcery and witchcraft, are present at religious processions, private festivals, crucifixions and the like, become entangled in crimes and intrigues, and have hair's-breadth escapes from horrible dens of infamy; sometimes even changed by magic into beasts; but at last re-united and made happy by some sudden and extraordinary series of coincidences. There is a force of genius in some of them; and they are interesting historically as illustrating the state of society towards the close of the Roman empire; but the general impression which they leave is stifling and even appalling—as of a world shattered into fragments, the air over

each inhabited fragment stagnant and pestilential, and healthy motion nowhere save in some inland spots of grassy solitude and in the breezes that blow over the separating bits of sea. One of the most curious features in them, as compared with the earlier classic poetry, is the more important social influence they assign to the passion of love, and, consequently, the more minute attention they bestow on the psychology of that passion, and the increased liberty of speech and action they give to women. Another respect in which they differ from the earlier Greek and Latin works of fiction, is the more minute, and, as we might say, more modern style in which they describe physical objects, and especially scenery. This is most observable in the Greek romances. It is as if the sense of the picturesque in scenery then began to appear more strongly than before in literature. In the *Daphnis and Chloe* of Longus, which is a sweet pastoral romance of the single island of Lesbos, there are descriptions of the varying aspects and the rural labours of the seasons such as we find in modern pastoral poems.

In the modern world, as well as the ancient, the Prose Fiction was one of the last forms of literature to be arrived at—and this, notwithstanding that the

fictions of the ancients survived to show the way, and to suggest imitation.

For the first six centuries, indeed, of what is called the Mediæval period, or from the sixth century to the twelfth, there was scarcely any literature whatever in any of the modern European tongues—these tongues not having then been formed, or not having extricated themselves with sufficient pliancy out of the chaos caused by the confusion of the Gothic with the Latin. In what remained of the Greek or Byzantine empire, stories or novels were occasionally written in the Greek tongue which still continued there intact—the most noted of these being *The Lives of Barlaam and Josaphat,* a spiritual or ecclesiastical romance of the eighth century by St. John Damascenus; in which, under the guise of the adventures of Josaphat, the son of an Indian king, who is converted to Christianity against his father's will by the holy Barlaam, and at last becomes a monk or hermit, the Greek form of Christianity is expounded and a monkish life is recommended. Among the Arabs and other Orientals of the same period, prose tales were far more abundant. The celebrated collection of the *Thousand and One Nights*—consisting of tales of hunchbacks, merchants, and genii, which had been

told in the bazaars of India, and other parts of the East, till they had become the common possession of the oriental imagination—were redacted into their Arabic form in the golden age of Arabic culture under the Caliphs of Bagdad. Meanwhile, in the European West, what literature there was—if we except heroic metrical legends of the Scandinavians and Germans of the continent, and a somewhat more various though still scanty vernacular literature among our insular Anglo-Saxons—consisted of writings, chiefly theological and historical, in the universal ecclesiastical Latin. Of this mediæval Latin literature of Europe, the portion most nearly approaching to Prose Fiction in its nature was that which consisted in the numberless legends of the *Lives of the Saints*—narratives, however, which were offered and read as history, and not as fiction. Prose Fiction, in fact, as we now understand it, reappeared in Europe only after the vernacular languages had pushed themselves publicly through the Latin, as the exponents, in each particular nation, of the popular as distinct from the learned thought; nor did it reappear even in these vernacular languages until they had well tried themselves first in other forms of literature, and especially in metrical forms. The outburst of

modern vernacular literature, simultaneously or nearly so, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in the various European nations, was, it is needless to say, metrical; and the evolution of the prose forms out of their metrical beginnings took place by the same process as in the history of Ancient Literature,—more rapidly, however, and with some obvious and striking exceptions, in consequence of the inheritance of so much of the prose literature of the ancients, and in consequence of the practice which some of the vernacular writers already had in Latin prose.

In the countries speaking the Romance tongues, or tongues derived from the Latin, the vernacular outburst took place, as all know, in two distinct jets or streams of Poetry—represented severally, in France, by the Lyric Poetry of the southern Troubadours, and the Narrative Poetry of the northern Trouveurs. Out of these two forms, both metrical, of early vernacular literature (and, doubtless, the same double tendency to the Lyric, on the one hand, and to the Narrative, on the other, is to be discerned in the contemporary efforts of the German Minnesingers) the various European literatures gradually developed themselves.

It was out of the Narrative Poetry of the Trouveurs, or out of whatever was analogous to that

elsewhere than in France, that the Prose Fiction might be expected most naturally to arise. And yet what do we see? Though the passion for narrative all over feudal Europe was something unprecedented; though the demand of the lords and ladies in their castles, of the peasants in their huts, and of the burghers in their households, was still for stories, stories; though, to satisfy this demand, the minstrels, and those who supplied them with their wares, invented, borrowed, translated, amplified and stole—now rehearsing known facts and genealogies, now collecting and shaping legends in which the facts and personages of Mediæval History were worked into romances of chivalry, now catching up classic stories of the ancient world and reproducing Alexander as a knight-errant and Virgil as a great magician, now fetching a subject out of ecclesiastical lore, now adapting some Byzantine or Oriental tale which had been brought westward by the Crusades, now tasking their own powers of fancy for additions to the horrors of the popular Demonology, and now only telling comic and licentious tales of real life;—yet, with few exceptions, all this immense trade in narrative literature, so far as it was vernacular and not Latin, was carried on in verse. Even the Fabliaux or facetious tales of real life, were, in great

part, metrical. This was the kind of composition, however, which tended most naturally to prose; and, hence, besides that in all countries there must have been hundreds of very early fabliaux, passing from mouth to mouth as rude prose jocosities, we find that, in one country at least, the earliest form of classic prose fiction was after this type.

A peculiarity of Italy, as compared with other lands, was that, though the taste for the narrative as well as for the lyric kind of poetry was felt there as strongly as elsewhere, and influenced the rising vernacular literature, the historical conditions of the country, in its transition through the middle ages, had not been such as to provide for that narrative taste a fund of material in the nature of a national legend or epic. Hence, in founding the modern literature of Italy, the genius of Dante employed itself, not on any national story, but on a theme wholly self-construeted, wide as the world physically, and morally as deep as the universal human reason; and, hence, when it chanced that, after Dante's poetry, and the passionate lyrics of Petrarch, the next demand of the Italian vernacular genius was for a work of prose fiction, the answer to the demand was the *Decameron* of Boccaccio (1313–1375). These short novels of gallantry

—collected from various sources and only invested by Boccaccio with the charms of his Italian style —may be regarded as the first noticeable specimens of finished prose fiction in the vernacular literature of modern Europe. The type of prose fiction which Boccaccio had thus introduced, and which may be called the Italian type, was continued, with some variations, by his Italian successors of the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—Sachetti, Cintio, &c.; but, early in this last century, a new style of fiction, the so-called Pastoral Romance, was introduced in Italy in the *Arcadia* of the Neapolitan Sannazaro.

In France, the earliest prose fictions, besides mere Fabliaux and romantic stories belonging to the common stock of the Trouveurs all over Europe, were versions of those tales of chivalry, relating to the exploits of Charlemagne and his peers, which, from the twelfth century onwards, formed the national epic of France. It was not till the fifteenth century that these had run their course, and that, to satisfy the tastes of the courtly classes of society, novelettes of gallantry, in imitation of those of Boccaccio, were introduced. Later still, France produced a perfectly original, and to this day almost unique, example of the fiction of satiric humour in

the works of François Rabelais (1483–1553). The "Pantagruelism" of Rabelais, and new batches of the short novels of love-intrigue, sufficed as prose fiction for France, until that country also received a Pastoral Romance of unconscionable length and tediousness in the *Astrée* of D'Urfé, the first part of which appeared in 1610.

No part of Europe contributed more richly to the early modern Prose Fiction than the Spanish Peninsula. The wars of the Goths and the Moors in Spain had transmitted, in abundance, legends for a national epic, which had been embodied in long metrical poems, and in warlike songs and ballads. Some of these, perhaps, with other more ordinary narratives, had also taken the shape of prose. It was towards the close of the fourteenth century, however, that Vasco Lobeyra, a Portuguese by birth, seizing a subject which did not appertain in particular to the Spanish Peninsula, but to the general fund of European tales of chivalry, wrote his famous *Amadis de Gaul*, called "the Iliad of the prose romances of knight-errantry." Subsequent Spanish romances of knight-errantry, in some of which Amadis was still the hero, and in others another imaginary personage named Palmerin, were numberless in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—the

most celebrated being that called *The Palmerin of England.* Meanwhile, the Spanish genius for prose fiction was showing itself in other styles. The Pastoral Romance—known in Italy, as we have seen, as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century—is believed to have been more peculiarly of Portuguese origin; and, after it had been cultivated by Portuguese poets, it was naturalized in Castilian prose by Montemayor, a writer of Portuguese birth (1520–1562). The *Diana* of Montemayor had nearly as many imitators as the *Amadis de Gaul,* and attained nearly as great celebrity out of Spain. A third type of Spanish prose fiction was the so-called Picaresque Novel, or novel of clever roguery, the first specimen of which was the *Life of Lazarillo de Tormes,* by Diego Mendoza, one of the most celebrated statesmen of the reign of Charles V. (1503–1575). Among the many Spanish imitations of this peculiar style of comic prose fiction—which other countries were to borrow from Spain—the best known is *Don Guzman de Alfarache,* published in 1599. It was a few years after this that Cervantes, after having trained himself in almost every kind of literature then known in Spain, the Drama and the Pastoral Romance included, united all the previous kinds of Spanish prose fiction, and superseded them

all, in his immortal *Don Quixote*. The first part of this masterpiece was published in 1605; the last in 1615, the year before the author's death.[1]

Thus, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, Prose Fiction, in most of its leading types—that of the short amusing novel of gallantry, that of the romance of enchantment and heroic chivalry, that of the pastoral romance, that of the riotous satire, and that of the picaresque novel—was an established form of literature, existing side by side with Narrative Poetry, Lyrical Poetry, Dramatic Poetry, History, &c., in the various Romance tongues of Europe. In Germany, where the vernacular development did not proceed so fast, there were yet, by this time, characteristic specimens of prose fiction, as well as of verse, in popular tales of Gothic demonology, and in pithy satiric and moral fables, expressive of the German common sense.

In no country was the impulse to the narrative form of literature earlier or stronger than in Britain. The Norman Conquest, interrupting the native

[1] It is right that the reader should know that I am not personally acquainted with *all* the works of early foreign prose fiction mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, but chiefly with those of Boccaccio, Rabelais, and Cervantes.

tendencies of the Saxons, which had been rather to the practical and ethical, handed over the initiation and conduct of a new literature in England to those who were preeminently the Trouveurs of Europe—*i.e.* to the Norman minstrels. Perhaps more of the distinguished Norman Trouveurs of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were born on the English than on the French side of the Channel; and so powerful was the infusion into England of the Trouveur or Narrative, as distinct from the Troubadour or Lyrical spirit, that, in the whole course of English literature since, one can see the narrative impulse ruling and the lyric subordinate. The passion for narration showed itself not in the French Trouveurs alone, but also in their brethren, the Latin Chroniclers. In part, indeed, the Trouveurs were also Chroniclers, writing in French those Bruts or legendary genealogies of Britain, and those records of recent Norman exploits, which also furnished matter to the prose chroniclers in Latin. But their characteristic productions were the French metrical romances. For such Romances they had an unusually rich fund of topics. Besides the common classical and mediæval subjects of Alexander, Charlemagne and the like, and besides subjects invented by their own Norman imagination, or suggested by incidents of

Norman history, or derived from their ancestral stock of Scandinavian legend, they came into possession, in virtue of their occupation of British ground, of that wonderful body of Arthurian romance which, bequeathed, in its original, by the Welsh and Armorican bards, and afterwards compiled in Latin by the Welsh pen of Geoffrey of Monmouth, was to receive expansions and modifications at the will of future poets. Metrical French Romances of King Alexander, King Horn, Havelok the Dane, &c., and French Romances of Chivalry about Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, were the entertainment of the Norman lords and their retainers as long as French was the dominant tongue in England. Some of these Romances, with lighter Fabliaux, had passed into French prose versions. The earliest English narrative poetry consisted mainly of translations of these Romances for the behoof of those who did not understand French; and, as was natural, such English translations became more common as English asserted its right as the national tongue. Even after Chaucer (1328-1400), forsaking French, as the language of a waning class, and lending the strength of his genius to the national English, had provided narrative entertainment of a more elaborate and modern kind in his tales of real life, and

his romantic stories borrowed from French, Italian, and classical sources, the romance of chivalry, with its giants, enchantments, tournaments, and wonderful adventures of heroic knights, continued popular in its prose form. The cycle of this Romance of British legend may be considered to have been completed in 1485, when Sir Thomas Malory's *Mort d'Arthur*, or compilation of Arthurian Romances "oute of certeyn bookes of Frensshe," was issued from Caxton's press.

Malory's *Mort d'Arthur*, or *History of King Arthur and of the Knights of the Round Table*, is one of those books the full effect and significance of which in the history of our literature it would require much research and much disquisition to exhaust. On the origin of the book alone there might be a historical essay of much interest. How the original groundwork came forth to the world in 1147, in the legends of Arthur and Merlin, which formed part of the Welsh Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin "History of the Britons," the materials of which he professed to have derived from Breton tradition and from Breton writings of which there is no trace; how Geoffrey's book at once seized the imagination of the age, and his legends were appropriated, amplified, and developed by contemporary metrical

chroniclers, and especially by the Anglo-Normans, Gaimar and Wace, and the Saxon Layamon; how, within the next century, new tissues of chivalrous and religious romance were woven out of the material thus accumulated, or attached to it and woven into it, by Anglo-Norman poets, themselves not wholly the inventors of what they wrote, but deriving the incidents and the names which they worked up from legend already afloat,—Robert de Borron adding the Roman du St. Graal and the developed History of Merlin, and Walter Mapes adding the Adventures of Sir Lancelot, the Queste du St. Graal, and the Mort d'Arthure specially so called, and two later writers, Lucas de Gast and Helie de Borron, supplying later fragments in the Romances of Sir Tristram and other knights; how the total mass so aggregated was shaped, adjusted, and again morselled out in parts by subsequent minstrels and writers in France and in England, gradually loosening itself from the restraint of verse, and flowing into oral prose; and how, at length, an unknown Sir Thomas Malory, living in the reign of Edward IV., did his service to posterity by recompiling the whole in connected English, according to his own taste, and perhaps for his own amusement, in some castle in the country, or old city-dwelling, where he had the

French scrolls and folios about him, and so provided Caxton with his copy:—here is a story of a book which might employ ingenuity as well as the story of the Homeric poems, and in connexion with which there might be discussed some of the same problems. It is as if the book were the production of no one mind, nor even of a score of successive minds, nor even of any one place or time, but were a rolling body of British-Norman legend, a representative bequest into the British air and the air overhanging the English Channel, from the collective brain and imagination that had tenanted that region through a definite range of vanished centuries. "After that "I had accomplysshed and fynysshed dyvers hys- "toryes," says Caxton, "as well of contemplacyon "as of other hystoryal and worldly actes of grete "conquerours and prynces, and also certeyn bookes "of ensaumples and doctryne, many noble and "dyvers gentylmen of this royame of England camen "and demaunded me many and oftymes wherefore "that I have not do make and emprynte the "noble hystorye of the Saynt Greal, and of the "moost renouned crysten kyng, fyrst and chyef of "the thre best crysten and worthy, Kyng Arthur, "whyche ought moost to be remembred emonge us "Englysshe men tofore al other crysten kynges."

Caxton answered that one of his reasons was, " that " dyvers men holde opynyon that there was no suche " Arthur, and that alle suche bookes as been maad of " hym ben but fayned and fables, bycause that somme " cronycles make of hym no mencyon ne remembre " hym noo thing ne of his knyghtes." The antiquarian arguments used by the gentlemen in reply seem to have but half convinced Caxton of the possibility that Arthur had ever had a real existence; but, on other grounds, he was willing to print the book. " For to passe the tyme," he says, " this " book shal be plesaunte to rede in, but for to gyve " fayth and byleve that al is trewe that is contayned " herein, ye be at your lyberte; but al is wryton for " our doctryne, and for to beware that we falle not " to vyce ne synne, but texercyse and folowe vertu, " by whyche we may come and atteyne to good fame " and renomme in thys lyf, and after thys shorte and " transytorye lyf to come unto everlastyng blysse in " heven." The book fully answers to this description. All in it is ideal, elemental, perfectly and purely imaginative; and yet all rests on a basis of what is eternal and general in human nature and in man's spiritual and social experience, so that, to use Caxton's very happy enumeration, " herein may be " seen noble chyvalrye, curtosye, humanyte, frend-

"lynesse, hardynesse, love, frendshyp, cowardyse, "murdre, hate, vertue, synne." We are led over a vague land of plain and hill, lake and forest, which we know to be Britain, and which contains towns and fair castles; over this dreamland we pursue valiant knights riding in quest of adventures, justing with each other whenever they meet, rescuing enchanted maidens, and combating with strange shapes and horrors; all occurs in a manner and according to laws totally out of relation to the real world; but every now and then there is the gleam of some beautiful spot which remains in the mind as a vision for ever, the flash of some incident conceived in the deepest spirit of poetry, the sudden quiver of some ethical meaning—many parts, moreover, obviously challenging interpretation as involving intentionally a half-expressed philosophy, while the whole may be taken, in its cohesion, as an Epic Allegory. It is the kind of book into which a poet may go for hints and fancies already made to his hands, in dealing with which by way of elaboration and expansion he may follow his own free will without sense of constraint, evolving meanings where they seem concealed, or fitting his own meanings to visual imaginations which start out of their apparent arbitrariness into pre-established connexion with them.

Accordingly, the body of Arthurian legend here locked up has served as a magazine of ideal subjects and suggestions to some of the greatest poets of our nation, from Spenser and Milton to our own Tennyson. No wonder that to so many in these days Malory's *King Arthur* has become once again a favourite pocket volume. To recline in a summer's day, for example, under the shelter of a rock on the coast of the Isle of Arran, and there with the solitary grandeurs of the Isle behind one, and with the sea rippling to one's feet and stretching in haze towards the opposite mainland, to pore over Malory's pages till, in the mood of poetic listlessness, the mainland over the haze seems again the very region where Arthur ruled and the knights journeyed and justed, and the romantic island itself an exempt spot on the contemporary margin whither the noise of them was wafted—this is reading such as is possible now but once or twice in a lifetime, and such as was known perhaps more when books were scarce.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, what England possessed of Prose Fiction consisted partly of the Arthurian and other romances of chivalry, and partly of facetious tales of real life akin to some of those in Chaucer. In this century, while the stock of national verse received its most important increase

in popular ballads and songs, there was a considerable increase also in the stock of prose fiction, both by home-made stories of English life and by translations. In the collection of *Early English Prose Romances*, edited by Mr. Thoms, we have a reprint of ten of these old favourites of the English fireside—"the Waverley Novels," as he calls them, "of the sixteenth century." The first is the legend of Robert the Devil, or of the Prince who, having been given over to the Devil ere his birth, runs a career of cruelties and crimes unparalleled, till he is miraculously reclaimed, does penance by living among the dogs, and becomes a shining light and marries the Emperor's daughter; the next is the History of Thomas of Reading, or the Six Worthy Yeomen of the West, an English social story of the days of Henry the First; next is the Story of Friar Bacon, and his great works as a magician; then, the story of Friar Rush, or of a merry Devil who gets into a monastery in the disguise of a servant, and plays all kinds of pranks there; then, a version of the mediæval legend of the poet Virgil, entitled "The Life of Vergilius, and of his Death, and the many marvels that he did in his life-time, by witchcraft and negromancy, through the help of the divells of Hell;" then, the old tale

of Robin Hood, in a brief shape; then, that of George-a-Green, the Pinner of Wakefield; then "The most pleasant History of Tom-a-Lincoln, that renowned soldier, the Red Rose Knight, surnamed the Boast of England: shewing his honourable victories in forcign countries, with his strange fortunes in Faery Land, and how he married the fair Anglitera, daughter to Prester John, that renowned monarch of the world;" after that, the History of Helyas, Knight of the Swan; and finally, adapted from the German, the Life and Death of Dr. John Faustus. Of these fictions — circulated as chap-books, and some of which have done duty as chap-books both in England and Scotland to the present day—one or two are rccompilations of older matter by persons whose names are known, and who were contemporaries of Shakespeare. The "History of Thomas of Reading," for example, is by a Thomas Deloney, a ballad-maker of those days; and "Tom-a-Lincoln," as it stands in the collection, is by a Richard Johnson, author of another well-known compilation, "The Seven Champions of Christendom." Our "Jack the Giant-Killer," which is as old, is clearly the last modern transmutation of the old British legcnd, told in Geoffrey of Monmouth, of Corineus the Trojan, the companion of the Trojan

Brutus when he first settles in Britain; which Corineus, being a very strong man and particularly good-humoured, is satisfied with being King of Cornwall, and killing out the aboriginal giants there, leaving to Brutus all the rest of the island, and only stipulating that, whenever there is a peculiarly difficult giant in any part of Brutus's dominions, he shall be sent for to finish the fellow.

While the stories thus circulating as chap-books, or the originals whence they were derived, were not disdained by the dramatists as subjects for their plots, additional subjects were furnished in abundance by translations from the Italian, the French, the Spanish, the Latin and the Greek, executed by persons who made translation their business, or by such of the dramatists themselves as could practise it occasionally. Among the earliest important translations in the department of pure fiction, I note these—part of Boccaccio in 1566, followed by Cintio's Hundred Tales; the Golden Ass of Apuleius in 1571; the Æthiopics of Heliodorus in 1587; Mendoza's Lazarillo de Tórmes by David Rowland in 1586; the Diana of Montemayor in 1598; Don Quixote, first in 1620; and Rabelais by Urquhart in 1653. These dates are suggestive. The influence of foreign precedents on the forms and the course of

our literature has hardly been sufficiently studied. The time when, in any particular instance, that influence comes into play, is usually marked, I think, by the appearance of the first translation of the work which acts as the precedent. If so, we should gather from the above dates that, while the Novel of Adventure and Gallantry, the Pastoral Romance, and the Picaresque Novel might have been naturalized in Britain by the beginning of the seventeenth century, and added to the older native Romance of Chivalry, the native Fiction of English life, and such other native forms of fiction as are represented in the chap-books, certain other types of fiction already known abroad—the Rabelaisian type and the Quixotic type—were still in reserve to be naturalized at a later day.

In the sixteenth century, however, England had already produced a form of scholarly prose fiction for which there had been no exact foreign precedent. This was the Political Allegory, represented in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia.* The original Latin edition of this celebrated work appeared in 1516, when the author was thirty-six years of age; and the English translation by Ralph Robinson was published in 1551. In this Romance—under the guise of a description of the imaginary island of

Utopia, given in conversation by one Raphael Hythoday, a seafaring man, "well stricken in age, with a black, sun-burnt face, a long beard," &c., to whom More is supposed to be introduced in the city of Antwerp by his friend Peter Ægidius, or Peter Giles—we have a philosophic exposition of More's own views respecting the constitution and economy of a state, and of his opinions on education, marriage, the military system, and the like. Such a style of fiction, once introduced, and requiring only as much or as little of genuine poetic fancy as an author might choose to throw into it, was likely to be kept up. Accordingly we have later examples of it, also originally in Latin, in Bacon's *Atlantis;* in an odd production of Bishop Hall, in his early life, entitled *Mundus Alter et Idem,* in which (with perhaps more of Rabelaisian satire than of political allegory in the design) we have verbal descriptions, and even maps, of the countries of Crapulia or Feeding-Land, Viraginia or Virago-Land, and other such regions; and in the *Argenis* of John Barclay. This last work, however, can be claimed for British literature only in an indirect manner. The author, the son of a Scotchman who had emigrated to France in the reign of James VI. and become a distinguished

Professor of Law in a French University, was a Frenchman by birth, a Catholic by religion, and the son of a French mother. He came over to England when young, lived in London, wrote various works, as his father had done, expounding a moderate Catholicism in opposition to the Jesuits, but at length retired to Rome, and there died in peace with the Papacy. His *Argenis*, written at Rome, was published in 1621, immediately after his death. It is an allegoric romance, in which the island of Sicily stands for France, and the recent civil wars of that country and its foreign relations during them are philosophically represented—Henry IV. figuring as Poliarchus, Calvin as Usinulca, the Huguenots as Hyperaphanii, &c. Apart from the allegoric undersense, however, the romance is praised as a really interesting story, rich in incidents and full of surprises, and yet skilfully conducted; while the Latin, according to Coleridge, is "equal to that of Tacitus in energy and genuine conciseness, and is as perspicuous as that of Livy." Coleridge wishes, but thinks the wish almost profane, that the work could have made its exit from this beautiful prose Latin and been moulded into a heroic poem in English octave stanza or epic blank verse. Instead of being known only to a few, it would

then, he thinks, have been in our popular list of classics.

Before any of these Latin allegories, except More's *Utopia,* had been published, the English language had received not only its first sustained and scholarly prose-fiction, but also one of the earliest specimens of its capacity for refined and artistic prose of any kind, in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia.* It was a posthumous publication. After a life of only two and thirty years, one of the most heroic and accomplished spirits of a heroic and accomplished age—a man whom England accounted "the rose and expectancy" of her fair state, and whom England's queen called lovingly "her Philip"—had perished by a chance wound received in a skirmish in the Netherlands (1586). All that he had left, besides the recollection of his qualities, consisted of some writings penned before his thirtieth year—a few Poems, an Essay in Defence of Poesy, and a Prose Romance of considerable length, but still incomplete. These were published after his death—the romance in 1593, under the care of his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, and with the title of "The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia," as having been written for her amusement. It is pleasant to think that, though these were but casual emanations from Sidney's

mind, and not intended by himself as full revelations of it, they show that the contemporary opinion of him was not a delusion. The Poems, beside Spenser's and others, will not go for much; but they have something of the poetic essence in them. The "Defence of Poesy" is one of the deepest and nicest little Essays on Poetry known to me. Of the *Arcadia* I will give a brief account.

The *Arcadia* is "a piece of prose-poetrie," says the writer of a Life of Sidney prefixed to one of the early editions of the work; "for, though it observeth not numbers and rhyme, yet the invention is wholly spun out of the phansie, but conformable to the possibilitie of truth in all particulars." This is a just description. The work is called a Pastoral Romance, but it would be better entitled a Romance Pastoral and Heroic. In the opening, we see two shepherds, Strephon and Claius, on the seashore of a Grcek island, talking, with magnanimous mutual esteem, of their common love for the beautiful shepherdess Urania, when, lo! cast on the beach near them by the waves, they descry the half-lifeless body of a young man. This is Musidorus, who, escaping with his friend Pirocles from a burning ship in which they were embarked, has managed to swim ashore by the help of a wooden coffer. At

his earnest entreaties, the shepherds carry him back in a fisherman's boat to the place of the wreck, to look for Pirocles. They see Pirocles clinging to the mast amid the rich spoils that are floating about; but, before they can reach him, a pirate's galley is on the spot, and Pirocles and the spoils are taken on board together. Disconsolate at the loss of his friend, Musidorus returns ashore with the shepherds, who, after consulting with him, propose to carry him to the house of a certain Kalander, a bounteous and hospitable gentleman in Arcadia, by whose help, they say, if by that of any one, Pirocles is likely to be recovered. They set out on their journey to Arcadia, passing through Laconia on their way.

"The third day, in the time that the morning did strew roses and violets in the heavenly floor against the coming of the sun, the nightingales (striving one with the other which could in most dainty variety recount their wrong-caused sorrow) made them put off their sleep; and, rising from under a tree, which that night had been their pavilion, they went on their journey, which by and bye welcomed Musidorus's eyes, wearied with the wasted soil of Laconia, with delightful prospect. There were hills which garnished their proud heights with stately trees; humble valleys whose base estate seemed comforted with the refreshing of silver rivers; meadows enamelled with all sorts of eye-pleasing flowers; thickets which, being lined with most pleasant shade, were witnessed so too by the cheerful disposition of many well-tuned birds;

each pasture stored with sheep feeding with sober security, while the pretty lambs with bleating oratory craved the dam's comfort; here a shepherd-boy piping as if he should never be old; there a young shepherdess knitting, and withal singing, and it seemed that her voice comforted her hands to work, and her hands kept time to her voice-musick. As for the houses of the country (for many houses came under their eye), they were all scattered, no two being one by the other, and yet not so far off as that it barred mutual succour—a show, as it were, of an accompanable solitariness, and of a civil wildness.

"'I pray you,' said Musidorus, then first unsealing his long silent lips, 'what countries be these we pass through, which are so diverse in show—the one wanting no store; the other having no store but of want?'

"'The country,' answered Claius, 'where you were cast ashore, and now are passed through, is Laconia; not so poor by the barrenness of the soil, though in itself not passing fertile, as by a civil war, which being these two years within the bowels of that estate between the gentlemen and the peasants (by them named Helots), hath in this sort as it were disfigured the face of nature, and made it so unhospitable as now you have found it—the towns neither of the one side nor the other willingly opening their gates to strangers, nor strangers willingly entering, for fear of being mistaken. But this country, where now you set your foot, is Arcadia; and even hard by is the house of Kalander, whither we lead you. The country being thus decked with peace, and the child of peace, good husbandry, these houses that you see so scattered are of men as we are, that live by the commodity of their sheep, and therefore in the division of the Arcadian estate are termed shepherds—a happy people, wanting little because they desire not much.'"

Arrived at Kalander's house, and received there under the assumed name of Palladius, Musidorus

becomes acquainted with many Arcadians. Thence the story expands itself—not confined to Arcadia, but ranging over other parts of Greece; not involving only shepherds and shepherdesses as the characters, or concerning itself only with pastoral loves and the other incidents of a shepherd's life, but bringing in kings and queens, mingling itself with the war between the Lacedæmonians and the Helots, and leading to combats in armour, new friendships and jealousies, many adventures and surprises, lovers' songs and soliloquies, and extremely high-flown conversations.

It would be mere pretence to say that the romance could be read through now by any one not absolutely Sidney-smitten in his tastes, or that, compared with the books which we do read through, it is not intolerably languid. It is even deficient in those passages of clear incisive thought which we find in the author's Essay on Poetry. No competent person, however, can read any considerable portion of it without finding it full of fine enthusiasm and courtesy, of high sentiment, of the breath of a gentle and heroic spirit. There are sweet descriptions in it, pictures of ideal love and friendship, dialogues of stately moral rhetoric. In the style there is a finish, an attention to artifice, a musical arrange-

ment of cadence, and occasionally a richness of phrase, for which English Prose at that time might well have been grateful. Seeing, too, that the complaints of wearisomeness which we bring against the book now, were not so likely to be made at the time of its publication, when readers had not been taught impatience by a surfeit of works of the same class—seeing, in fact, that the book was so popular as to go through ten editions in the course of fifty years[1]—I am disposed to believe that this last merit was not the least important. Perhaps, however, some share in breaking up the uncouthness of the Elizabethan prose, and showing its capabilities in the elegant and graceful, ought to be attributed to some of the desultory prose fictions of Greene and of others of the pre-Shakespearian dramatists, and especially to Lyly's *Euphues* (1597). This composition may be considered as a romance, inasmuch as it consists of conversations and epistles strung on a thread of fictitious narrative. The "Euphuism" of Lyly has been parodied by Shakespeare and by Scott; and there is no doubt that, as an affectation of the Elizabethan age, it was a fair subject for ridicule. I believe, however, that the "Euphuism" of Lyly was but the exaggeration of a quest after an increase of dignity and artifice in prose style which we find in all

the writers of the age, Sidney and Shakespeare included; and that the Euphuistic passion for florid phrases and quaint antitheses did our prose some good.

But the most memorable characteristic of the *Arcadia* is its ideality. It is significant of this, that, till the Restoration, the *Arcadia* of Sidney and the poetry of Spenser were always mentioned together as kindred productions of English genius. The association (allowing for the great superiority in degree which is to be accorded to Spenser) is a singularly proper one. The two men, the one in prose and the other in verse, adopted the same poetic form, and were ruled by the same poetic instincts. Spenser's earlier poetry had been of the pastoral kind—descriptions of ideal scenes of Arcadian life, and dialogues of ideal and representative shepherds. Whether this Pastoral form of poetry was of Portuguese or of Italian origin, or whether it was only a reproduction of the ancient Idyl, Spenser made it thoroughly English. In his later poetry, and most splendidly in his "Faery Queene," he passed from the Pastoral into the Heroic Romance—throwing his ideal Arcadia back into the enchanted and chivalrous eld, covering it with thicker forests, planting it with castles, and peopling it with knights and ladies,

satyrs and nymphs, necromancers and shapes of ghastliness. With Spenser for his contemporary, Sidney—who, as an Italian and Spanish scholar, had become acquainted with the foreign Pastoral for himself, had read the "Arcadia" of Sannazaro, and had translated lyrics from the "Diana" of Montemayor—schemed a pastoral romance in English prose. It was part of his scheme, however, not to make it a pastoral romance merely, but to interfuse with the pastoral the higher matter of the heroic. Thus, except that he abandoned giants and enchantments, and kept his incidents within the poetic possibilities of truth, his *Arcadia* was a combination of some of the elements of the "Faery Queene" with something of the Spenserian Pastoral. He perfectly knew what he was doing. Our wretched modern criticism, not content with pointing out the want of human interest which must always characterise the Pastoral as compared with other forms of poetry, has prevented us from doing justice to it as an extinct form, by filling our minds with an absurd misconception of it. The Pastoral, in the hands of such poets as Spenser, was never meant to be a representation of the real life of shepherds, their real feelings, or their real language; it was but the voluntary and avowed transference of the poet himself into a kind of exis-

tence which, as being one of few and elementary conditions, was therefore the best suited for certain varieties of that exercise of pure phantasy in which the poet delights. The shepherds were not shepherds, were never meant to be shepherds; they were imaginary beings whom it was convenient, because of their ideal nature, to remove away out of the midst of actual life into an ideal Arcadia. And so when the heroic was blended with the Arcadian, Sidney, as a prose poet, acted deliberately in rejecting the historical, and representing men as they never were; and he would have smiled with contempt at the modern criticism that would have objected to him the vagueness of his Arcadia as to time and place, the unreality of his shepherds, and the ideal perfection of his heroes. For some sixty or seventy years, Sidney's *Arcadia* co-operated with Spenser's poetry in maintaining a high tone of ideality in English literature.

Something of this ideality—or, to give it a negative name, this want of direct human interest—is to be found in the next work of reputed consequence in the history of English Prose Fiction, the *Parthenissa* of Roger Boyle, an elder brother of Robert Boyle, and known, during the Protectorate, as Lord Broghill, and, after the Restoration, as the Earl of

Orrery. *Parthenissa,* which was not his only literary attempt, was published, in six parts, shortly after the Restoration, and was collected into one large folio volume in 1676. It is a romance after a new fashion, which had come into being in France, and perhaps in other parts of Europe, later than the Pastoral and the Romance of Chivalry. Although still ideal in its nature, it was ideal after a much more artificial style than the older Heroic or Pastoral. Its peculiarity consisted in this, that the scene was laid in the ancient world, and that the characters were actual or supposed personages of classical or ancient history, but were made to speak and act like high-flown gentlemen and ladies of the seventeenth century. This style of Classic-Heroic fiction, in which modern ideas of courage, courtesy, fidelity in love, and universal human perfection, were embodied in stories of ancient Greeks and Romans, Egyptians and Babylonians, Phrygians and Persians, had obtained immense popularity in France, in consequence chiefly of the achievements in it of three nearly contemporary writers—Gomberville, Calprenède, and Mademoiselle de Scuderi. "Gomberville," says Mr. Hallam, "led the way in his *Polexandre,* first published in 1632, and reaching, in later editions, to about 6,000 pages." Calpre-

nède's *Cassandra* appeared in 1642, and his *Cleopatra* was completed in 1646 — both enormously prolix. Mademoiselle de Scuderi, after beginning in her *Ibrahim* in 1635, wrote her *Grand Cyrus* and her *Clelie*, each in ten volumes. As this form of fiction was of French origin, so it seemed to suit the French taste better than that of any other nation. While it was yet popular in France, however, the Earl of Orrery seems to have made an attempt, in his *Parthenissa*, to naturalize it among his countrymen. "The sun was already so far declined," thus the romance opens, "that his heat was not oppressive, "when a stranger, richly attired and proportionately "blessed with all the gifts of nature and education, "alighted at the temple of Hierapolis in Syria, where "the Queen of Love had settled an Oracle as famous "as the Deity to whom it was consecrated." You must not suppose that I have gone many pages into the Romance beyond this introductory sentence; but, turning over the leaves of the large folio, and swooping down on the text here and there, I perceived that there were Romans, Carthaginians, Armenians, and Parthians in it, and that, besides Artabanes the Parthian, who is the gentleman that alighted at the temple, and Parthenissa, the daughter of a Parthian general, with whom that gentleman appeared to be

in love, the story, somehow or other, brought in Hannibal, Massinissa, Mithridates, Spartacus, and other persons equally well known in the vicinity of the ancient Mediterranean. How they came into the story, or what the story is, I cannot tell you; nor will any mortal know, any more than I do, between this and doomsday; but there they all are, lively though invisible, like carp in a pond.

Nothing as yet in British prose fiction, save, perhaps, old Malory's compilation of the *Mort d'Arthur*, and the rough, strongly-seasoned chap-books, that could seize the national heart, as distinct from the fancies of the educated, or imprint itself lastingly on the national memory! But such a work was coming! While Boyle's *Parthenissa* was finding its leisurely readers, there was living in Bedford Jail, where he had been confined, with brief intervals, ever since the Restoration, a tall, strong-boned, ruddy-faced, reddish-haired man, already known to the Justices of that district as John Bunyan, an obstinate Baptist preacher. He was comparatively illiterate; the Bible and Foxe's Martyrs were the books he chiefly read—on his preserved copy of the last of which may be still seen marginal comments in his hand in ill-spelt doggrel; and he had probably never read a romance in his life, except, in his

unregenerate days, the old chap-book of Bevis of Southampton. But he was a man of natural genius, with a wit none of the weakest, and an imagination about the most fervid in England; and in the events of his previous life—his boyhood and youth among English villagers, his campaign as a soldier in the Parliamentary army, and, above all, his inward experience and his mental agonies and aberrations until he had settled in the peace of his Christian belief—he had had an education very thorough in its kind, if not quite the same as was given at Cambridge or Oxford. In Bedford Jail he occupied himself in preaching to the prisoners; and, to while away what remained of his time, he thought of writing a book. What the intended book was, he does not say; for, before he had gone far in it, he had fallen upon another:—

"And thus it was: I, writing of the way
And race of saints in this our gospel day,
Fell suddenly into an Allegory
About their journey and the way to glory,
In more than twenty things which I set down.
This done, I twenty more had in my crown;
And they began again to multiply,
Like sparks that from the coals of fire do fly.
'Nay, then,' thought I, 'if that you breed so fast,
'I'll put you by yourselves, lest you at last
'Should prove *ad infinitum*, and eat out
'The book that I already am about.'"

And so, out of that old notion of the Christian life as a pilgrimage, which had existed in hundreds of minds before till it had become a commonplace, there grew and grew in Bunyan's mind the whole visual allegory of his book—from the Wicket-gate seen afar over the fields under the Shining Light, on, by the straight undeviating road itself, with all its sights and perils, and through the Enchanted Ground and the pleasant land of Beulah, to the black and bridgeless river by whose waters is the passage to the glimmering realms, and the brightness of the Heavenly City.

It was after Bunyan's release from prison in 1672, and when he was over forty-four years of age, that the book was finished; and, when he consulted his friends as to printing it, there were great differences of opinion.

> "Some said, 'John, print it;' others said, 'Not so!'
> Some said it might do good; others said 'No.'"

Those who objected did so on the ground that Fiction was an unlawful method of inculcating truth, a method already prostituted to the service of pleasure and the Devil. This matter Bunyan discussed for himself. Was not God's own Book, nay His moral government as shown in the history of the Hebrews,

full of types, foreshadows, and metaphors; had not Christ and his Apostles spoken in parables; and was it not found that eminent men of recent times, men "as high as trees" intellectually, had delivered their doctrines by way of allegory and imagined dialogue? If these last had abused the truth, the curse was on them, and not on their method! And so, with his strong sense, he came to the right conclusion. Nay, he knew that his book would last!

> "Wouldest thou remember,
> From New Year's day to the last of December?
> Then read my fancies. They will stick like burs;
> And may be, to the helpless, comforters."

The immediate popularity of the book in England, Scotland, and the Puritan colonies of America, showed that Bunyan had not miscalculated its power. By the year 1685, there were ten editions of it—coarsely printed, it is true, and on coarse paper; for the poor and the rude discovered its merits long before it was customary to speak of it as a feat of literary genius. Such of Bunyan's more critical contemporaries as did read it would not believe that the untaught Baptist preacher was its real author; and he had to write the second part of the Allegory, and his other Allegory of the *Holy War*, to convince them.

Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and his *Holy War*

are the last English works of prose fiction in which, for many a day, we find high poetic ideality. It is, indeed, an alleged fact in our literary history that, from the date of the Restoration onwards till near the close of the eighteenth century, this quality, and certain other qualities associated with it, had forsaken the aggregate mind of England. In such men as Milton and Bunyan, sons as they were of the prior period of Puritan supremacy, the quality survived for a time, and that in an inordinate degree; but, when these men died out, the nation seemed to enter on a long period of very different intellectual manifestation—an age of wit and animal recklessness and keen physical research, an age of Whiggism and Toryism, in which one had done with "the sublimities," and winked when they were talked of. It was as if, to use a phrenological figure, the national brain of Britain had then suffered a sudden contraction in the frontal organs of ideality, wonder, and comparison, and in the related coronal region, and, retaining perhaps the same force and mass on the whole, had balanced the deficiency by a corresponding expansion of the occiput, and an increased prominence in such special anterior organs as wit, number, and weight, and perhaps also causality. Henceforward, at all events, high ideality—with an exception here and

there—takes leave of British literature. In the department of Poetry, it is the age of declamatory maxim and sentiment, of fine metrical wit and criticism, of a quick fancy in the conventional and artificial. Above all, it was the age of the Comic Drama. The name of Dryden, the first and greatest laureate of the period, and its living link with the period that had passed, suggests at once the prosaic strength that was being gained, and the subtle and soaring peculiarities that were being lost.

In the Narrative Prose Fiction of the time we should expect to find those characteristics (and what they are is well known) which Dryden and others imparted to its Dramatic Poetry. And, to the extent to which narrative prose fiction was practised, such was actually the case. Mrs. Aphra Behn, who died in 1689, after having written many plays, some poems, and a few short novels, is remembered as a kind of female Wycherley. "As love is the most "noble and divine passion of the soul," writes the warm-blooded little creature in the opening of one of her novels, called *The Fair Jilt; or, the Amours of Prince Tarquin and Miranda,* "so it is that to which "we may justly attribute all the real satisfactions of "life; and, without it, man is unfinished and un-"happy." It is the text of all her tales, but with

the swiftest possible interpretation. The tales may have been read by Charles II., Dryden, Rochester, Etherege, and other wits of the day, to all of whom the fair Aphra was personally known; and they were certainly more read in polite circles than Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. But Aphra's place in the literature of her day was a slight one; and the fact that she alone is now usually named as representing the Novel of the Restoration shows how little of the real talent of the time took that particular direction. It was not till considerably later, when the passion for the Comic Drama had somewhat abated, and when, by the coming in of Dutch William, the moral atmosphere at the centre of the nation had been a little cleared, that the Prose Fiction shot up into vigour and importance. This it did in Swift and Defoe.

LECTURE II.

BRITISH NOVELISTS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

THE modern British Prose Fiction, as distinct from such earlier works as came under our notice in the last lecture, may be considered to have begun in Swift and Defoe.

It was in 1704, the second year of the reign of Queen Anne, that Swift, then in his thirty-eighth year, and known as a strange, black-browed Irish parson, who had come over to try to connect himself with the Whigs, and so open for himself a career out of Ireland, published his *Battle of the Books* and his *Tale of a Tub.* The publications were anonymous, but were traced to their author; and, from that time forward, through the whole of the reign of Queen Anne, the whole of that of George I., and part of that of George II., Swift—alternating between London and Ireland, and, latterly, no longer a Whig,

but a dictator among the Tory politicians, who had raised him to the Deanery of St. Patrick's, Dublin, but did not dare to make him a bishop—continued to pour forth controversial and other tracts in verse and in prose, and to be regarded, even with such men as Pope and Addison among his contemporaries, as "the greatest genius of the age." Among his slighter tracts were several in the same vein of satiric fiction as the two early productions that have been named; but his only other work of any considerable length in that vein, was his *Gulliver's Travels,* published in 1727, when he was in his sixty-first year. By that time, Defoe, occupying a much humbler position among his contemporaries than belonged to the imperious Dean of St. Patrick's, was also known as a writer of prose fiction.

An eager Whig and Dissenter, the son of a London butcher, and six years older than Swift, Defoe had begun his career as a writer of political pamphlets as early as the reign of Charles II.; for about thirty-seven years he had gone on writing such pamphlets on the questions and occurrences of the time, sometimes getting thanks for them, or even a commissionership or other post from the Whigs, but more frequently getting nothing but persecution, or coming within the clutches of the law for libel; and, if

we except his *True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal,* which he wrote for a publisher, to be prefixed to "Drelincourt on Death," and carry off that otherwise unvendible work, it was not till near the close of his life, when other means of livelihood, commercial and literary, had failed him, that he betook himself to fictitious story-writing. His *Robinson Crusoe* appeared in 1719, when he was in his fifty-ninth year; and, during the twelve remaining years of his life, he published, in rapid succession, his *Adventures of Captain Singleton,* his *Duncan Campbell,* his *Fortunes of Moll Flanders,* his *History of Colonel Jack,* his *Journal of the Plague,* his *Memoirs of a Cavalier,* his *Roxana, or the Fortunate Mistress,* &c. Besides these, there were some twenty other publications of different kinds from his busy pen during the same twelve years. Altogether, the list of Defoe's known writings includes 210 books or pamphlets; but posterity has agreed to forget most of these, and to remember chiefly some of his works of prose fiction.

At the close of my last lecture, I called attention to the fact that, from the Restoration of 1660 (perhaps, to clear myself from such exceptions as I then indicated, I should have been more safe in saying, from the Revolution of 1688), British society, and, with it, British intellectual activity, is seen passing

into an era of strikingly new conditions. According to the common feeling, I said, Britain then passed into a period in which, to all appearance, it had "done with the sublimities." Do we not recognize this every day in our common historical talk? Is it not one of our commonplaces that "the Eighteenth Century"—and "the Eighteenth Century" must, in this calculation, be reckoned from about the year 1688, the year of our English Revolution, to about 1789, the year of the French Revolution—was, both in Britain, and over the rest of the civilized world, a century bereft of certain high qualities of heroism, poetry, faith, or whatever else we may choose to call it, which we do discern in the mind of previous periods, and distinguished chiefly by a critical and mocking spirit in literature, a superficial and wide-ranging levity in speculation, and a perseverance reaching to greatness only in certain tracks of art and of physical science? Do we not observe that it is in this century that there arises and is established, as the paramount influence in British thought and British action, that distinction of Whiggism and Toryism by which we still find ourselves polarized into two factions, and which, however necessary it may have been, and whatever may have been its services in the past, is certainly so far from

being the most profound distinction possible to the human reason, or even visible in human history, that there is not nowadays any noble or really powerful soul in these islands but, in his inner heart, spurns it, despises it, and throws it off? Do we not observe, further, that our historical writers divide themselves, as by the operation of a constitutional difference, into two sects or schools—the one seeking its subjects in the older ages of British History, back in the Puritan, or in the Tudor, or even in the feudal and Norman times, as if there were little of the highest order of interest in the period which has elapsed since the Revolution; the other, with Lord Macaulay at their head, actually commencing their researches and their studies from the time when the modern distinction of Whiggism and Toryism makes its appearance, as if all before that were but chaos and barbarism, and only then our nation ceased to keep reckoning savagely by the stars, and began to voyage regularly by the loadstone?

Here, as in most other such cases, a deeper study of the facts might, I believe, provide a reconciliation. Whether this systematic depreciation of the Eighteenth Century is just, is a question involving perhaps larger speculative considerations than have yet been brought into it. If it is supposed that those

changes of moods which we observe in nations and even in Humanity in the aggregate, as well as in individuals, are caused by additions and subductions of the general vital energy with which Humanity is charged; if it is supposed that now somehow, as if out of celestial extra-planetary space, there is shot into the general nerve of the race an accession of force, raising its tone and its intensity, and that again this accession may be withdrawn, leaving the race comparatively languid; then the undervaluing of one age as compared with another in our historical retrospections is not unscientific. It is but as saying of an individual man that, at one time, what with the excitement of some great emergency, he is splendid and transcends himself, and that, at another, what with the absence of stimulating occasion or with temporary ill health (caused, it may be, by obvious physical or atmospheric influences), he sinks beneath his usual level. As, in the case of an individual, a temporary malevolence of atmospheric conditions, or of other conditions of nature out of himself, may depress his mental energy and actually lessen the worth of all that he thinks and says while the adverse conjunction lasts, so may there not be cosmical conditions, conditions of total nature outside of Humanity, tremors telluric and even blasts sidereal

along the earth's orbit, or along the mightier path in which our whole system is voyaging, of a kind sometimes to cause epidemics which sweep through the life of the globe, and seem like admonitions that the globe itself might be replunged into the fell pre-Adamite state whence it emerged to support man, and, at other times, without any such glaring stroke of decimation and death, to lead with equal certainty to weaknesses and untoward intellectual variations? On the other hand, if we adopt the more general notions of Progress, which do not suppose any such givings and takings as going on between Humanity and the rest of the universe known or unknown, but suppose a definite amount of energy or of possibility locked up once for all beyond escape in the actual organism of Humanity, and subject only to evolution, then, as all times are successively parts of the self-contained evolution, none is to be depreciated, and those nearest to ourselves least of all.

I am not going to discuss these alternatives—either, on the one hand, to add my voice to the popular and now commonplace outcry against the poor Eighteenth Century; or, on the other, to fight its battle. This only seems, for the present, pertinent to my subject,—that, agreeably to the views we took in the former lecture, as to the relative capabilities

of Prose and Verse, we should expect to find that, to the extent to which we do allow some such change to have taken place in British thought and British society as that which some would call offhand a degeneracy, to the same extent Prose would assert its sway in those regions of authorship which are more peculiarly its own. If the peculiar regions of Prose—not those into which it *may* penetrate, or into which, perhaps, it will *yet* penetrate, but those which were first assigned over to it, and where its rule is least disputed—are the regions of the comic, and the historically complex, the didactic, and the immediately practical, while Verse retains a certain superior, though not exclusive, mastery in the realms of the sublime, the elemental or ideal, and the highly impassioned; then British society, when it lost, if it did lose, those peculiarities of sustained ideality of conception, of faith in things metaphysical, and of resoluteness in impassioned aims, which had formerly borne it up to the poetic pitch, and fell into a comparative flat of complicated and bustling activity, with Whiggism and Toryism regulating the currents, did at least, by that very change, present a state of things favourable to the increase of Prose Literature as regards relative quantity, and also to the use of new and special prose forms.

Do not the facts correspond with the expectation? In the eighteenth century, as we have defined its duration, the chief poets or writers of verse in Britain are, after Dryden, who links it with the time foregoing,—Pope, Prior, Gay, Addison, Southerne, Rowe, Hughes, Allan Ramsay, Young, Thomson, Dyer, Shenstone, Gray, Co lins, Akenside, Johnson, Goldsmith, Churchill, Chatterton, Blair, Home, Beattie, the two Wartons, and Darwin; names suggestive of very various excellence, but not, save in one or two instances, of excellence either very extraordinary in degree or in kind peculiarly poetic. In the list of prose-writers for the same period, we have the names of—Dryden again, and Locke, and Clarke, and Berkeley, and Butler, and Hartley, and Hume, and Adam Smith; of Burnet, and Atterbury, and Tillotson, and South; of Defoe, and Swift, and Addison again, and Steele, and Shaftesbury, and Bolingbroke, and several comic dramatists; of Johnson again, and Goldsmith again; of Richardson, and Fielding, and Smollett, and Sterne, and Walpole, and Henry Mackenzie; of Hume again, and Gibbon, and Robertson, and Hugh Blair, and the younger Warton; and of others, and still others in different departments, not forgetting Junius and Burke. Are we not here in the middle of a tide of prose unexampled

in any former time? That, in older times, there were specimens of prose perhaps higher in some respects than any belonging to this era—more majestic, more impassioned, more poetical—may be admitted, in conformity with what has been said as to the ultimate capabilities of Prose, even in competition with Verse. But what wealth here, what variety, what versatility! It is clearly an age in which Prose was, on the whole, the more congenial, and in which the most important and effective work of the British mind, as the British mind then understood its work, devolved on Prose naturally, and was shared in by Verse chiefly because Verse had come sorely down in the world, had little of its proper work left, and undertook anything rather than be idle. Does not Gibbon alone outweigh, in real merit, half a score of the contemporary versifiers? And Hume or Adam Smith another half-score; and Fielding or Burke another? With the exception of Pope and Thomson, and one or two others of the poetic list, has not Prose the evident advantage, even in the finer and subtler exercises of mind; and are not Addison and Johnson in prose superior to their own selves in verse? In short, accepting, if we choose, the opinion that the eighteenth century was a prosaic age, may we not subject the opinion, in

accepting it, to a slight etymological twist, so as to turn it, to some extent, into a compliment to the poor shivering century of which it is intended as a vilification? May we not, when we next hear the eighteenth century in Britain spoken of as a prosaic century, acquiesce in the phrase, with this interpretation attached—that it was indeed a prosaic century, inasmuch as it produced an unprecedented quantity of most excellent and most various Prose?

The new British prose fiction which came into being near the beginning of the century in the works of Swift and Defoe, was one of the most notable manifestations of the increasing sufficiency of Prose generally. There had been already in Britain the Arthurian prose romance, with its wondrous ideality, the grotesque and facetious tales of the chap-books, the Utopian or political romance, the wearisome Arcadian Romance or Pastoral-Heroic, the still more prolix romance of modernized classic heroism, the unique romance of Bunyan, and also, to some extent, the Novel of French and Italian gallantry; but here was a kind of fiction which, whatever it might lack in comparison with its predecessors, grasped contemporary life with a firmer hold at a thousand points simultaneously, and arrested more roughly the daily forms of human interest.

Swift, in his fictions, as in the rest of his writings, is the British satirist of his age. His prototype, in as far as he had any, was Rabelais. In Swift first the mad, the obscene, the ghastly, the all but infernal and yet infinitely sorrowful humour of the French satirist of the sixteenth century appears in full measure in the literature of Britain. That he was a reader of Rabelais cannot be doubted. He adopts his style and the whimsicalities of his method so openly as almost to court the name of his imitator. But it was as a man of original genius, who would have gone near to be the Rabelais of his time and country, even had no Rabelais been in France before him.

Indubitably one of the most robust minds of his age, Swift, in the first place, went wholly along with his age, nay, tore it along with him faster than it could decorously go, in its renunciation of romance and all "the sublimities." He, a surpliced priest (as Rabelais had also been), a commissioned expositor of things not seen, *was* an expositor of things not seen; but it was of those that are unseen because they have to be dug for down in the concealing earth, and not of those that fill the upward azure, and tremble by their very nature beyond the sphere of vision. The age for him was still too full of the

cant of older beliefs, preserved in the guise of "respectabilities;" and, to help to clear it of this, he would fix its gaze on its own roots, and on the physical roots of human nature in general, down in the disgusting and the reputedly bestial. I say this not in the way of judgment, but of fact. It is what we all know of Swift—they who see good in his merciless method, as well as they who abhor it. But, with all this excess of his age in its own spirit, even to what was considered profanity and blasphemy, Swift, in many respects, adjusted himself to it. He flung himself, none more energetically, into its leading controversy of Whiggism and Toryism. He was at first, somewhat anomalously, a Whig in civil politics and ecclesiastically a High Churchman, consenting to changes in the secular system of the State, but zealous for the preservation and extension of that apparatus of bishoprics, churches, and endowments, which the past had consolidated—though for what end, save that Swifts, as well as Cranmers and Lauds, could work it, he hardly permits us to infer. Later, he was a Tory in state-politics as well. In both stages of his political career, he took an active interest in current social questions. He was as laborious as a prime minister in his partisanship, as vehement and minute in his animosities. He had

some peculiar tenets which he perseveringly inculcated—among which was that now called "The Emancipation of Women."

And yet, though he concerned himself in this manner with the controversies and social facts of his time, how, underneath such concern, we see a raging tumult of thought about humanity as a whole, over which all these facts and controversies of his time must have really floated as things ludicrous and contemptible! It is one of the peculiarities of Swift that, though belonging to an age in which Whiggism and Toryism had come in lieu of older distinctions and beliefs, and though himself sharing in the renunciation of these as effete fanaticism, yet in him, more than in any other man of his time, we see a mind bursting the bounds of Whiggism and Toryism, not dwelling in them, seeing round and round them, and familiar in its own recesses with more general and more awful contemplations. True, Swift's philosophy of human nature, in which his partisanship was engulphed, was not the same as that of the elder men—the Shakespeares and the Miltons, whose souls had also tended to the boundless and the general. It was a philosophy of misanthropy rather than of benevolence, of universal despair rather than of hope, of the blackness under the earth, and the demons

tugging there at their connexions with man, rather than of the light and evangelism of the countervailing Heaven. But herein at least was a source of strength which made him terrible among his contemporaries. He came among them by day as one whose nights were passed in horror; and hence in all that he said and did there was a vein of ferocious irony.

While all Swift's fictions reveal his characteristic satirical humour, they reveal it in different degrees and on different themes and occasions. In some of his smaller squibs of a fictitious kind we see him as the direct satirist of a political faction. In the *Battle of the Books* we have a satire directed partly against individuals, partly against a prevailing tone of opinion and criticism. In the *Tale of a Tub* he appears as the satirist of the existing Christian Churches, the Papal, the Anglican, and the Presbyterian—treating each with the irreverence of an absolute sceptic in all that Churches rest upon, but arguing in behalf of the second. In the four parts of *Gulliver* he widens the ground. In the Voyage to Laputa, &c., we have a satire on various classes of men and their occupations; and in the Voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag, and still more in the story of the Houynhmns and Yahoos, we have satires on human nature and human society, down to their very foundations.

With what power, what genius in ludicrous invention, these stories are written, no one needs to be reminded. Schoolboys, who read for the story only, and know nothing of the satire, read *Gulliver* with delight; and our literary critics, even while watching the allegory and commenting on the philosophy, break down in laughter from the sheer grotesqueness of some of the fancies, or are awed into pain and discomfort by the ghastly significance of others. Of Swift we may surely say, that, let our literature last for ages, he will be remembered in it, and chiefly for his fictions, as one of the greatest and most original of our writers—the likest author we have to Rabelais, and yet with British differences. In what cases one would recommend Swift is a question of large connexions. To all strong men he is and will be congenial, for they can bear to look round and round reality on all sides, even on that which connects us with the Yahoos. Universality is best. In our literature, however, there are varieties of spirits—

Black spirits and white,
Green spirits and grey;

And so,

Mingle, mingle, mingle,
Ye that mingle may.

If Swift, in his fictions, is the satirist of his age, Defoe, in most of his, is its chronicler or newspaper-reporter. He had been well beaten about in his life, and had been in many occupations—a hosier, a tile-maker, a dealer in wool; he had travelled abroad and in Scotland; and he was probably as familiar with the middle and lower strata of London society as any man living. He had been in prison and in the pillory, and knew the very face of the mob and ragamuffinism in its haunts. Hence, although he too had been a political pamphleteer, and had written with a blunt, straightforward energy, and even with a sarcastic irony, in the cause of liberty and Whiggism, yet, when he betook himself to concocting stories, the sale of which might bring him in more money than he could earn as a journalist, he was content to make them plain narrations, or little more. In the main, as all know, he drew upon his knowledge of low English life, framing imaginary histories of thieves, courtesans, buccaneers, and the like, of a kind to suit a coarse, popular taste. He was a great reader, and a tolerable scholar, and he may have taken the hint of his method from the Spanish picaresque Novel, as Swift adopted his from Rabelais. On the whole, however, it was his own robust sense of reality that

led him to his style. There is none of the sly humour of the foreign picaresque Novel in his representations of English ragamuffin life; there is nothing of allegory, poetry, or even of didactic purpose; all is hard, prosaic, and matter-of-fact, as in newspaper paragraphs, or the pages of the Newgate Calendar. Much of his material, indeed, may have been furnished by his recollections of occurrences, or by actual reports and registers; but it is evident that no man ever possessed a stronger imagination of that kind which, a situation being once conceived, teems with circumstances in exact keeping with it. When the ghost of Mrs. Veal appears to Mrs. Bargrave, at Canterbury, it is in "a scoured silk newly made up;" and when, after chatting with Mrs. Bargrave, and recommending to her Drelincourt's Book on Death, the ghost takes her leave of the worthy woman, who has been quite unconscious all the time of the disembodied nature of her visitor, it is at Mrs. Bargrave's door, "in the street, in the face of the beast-market, on, a Saturday, being market-day at Canterbury, at three-quarters after one in the afternoon." This minuteness of imagined circumstance and filling up, this power of fiction in facsimile of nature, is Defoe's unfailing characteristic. Lord Chatham is

said to have taken the *History of a Cavalier* for a true biography; and the *Account of the Plague of London* is still read by many under a similar delusion. There is no doubt that these, as well as the fictions laid more closely in the author's own time, are, for the purposes of historical instruction, as good as real. It is in the true spirit of a realist, also, that Defoe, though he is usually plain and prosaic, yet, when the facts to be reported are striking or horrible, rises easily to their level. His description of London during the Plague leaves an impression of desolation far more death-like and dismal than the similar descriptions in Thucydides, Boccaccio, and Manzoni. It is a happy accident, too, that the subject of one of his fictions, and that the earliest on a great scale, was of a kind in treating which his genius in matter of fact necessarily produced the effect of a poem. The conception of a solitary mariner thrown on an uninhabited island was one as really belonging to the fact of that time as those which formed the subject of Defoe's less-read fictions of coarse English life. Dampier and the Buccaneers were roving the South Seas; and there yet remained parts of the land-surface of the earth of which man had not taken possession, and on which sailors were occasionally thrown adrift by the brutality of cap-

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tains. Seizing this text, more especially as offered in the story of Alexander Selkirk, Defoe's matchless power of inventing circumstantial incidents made him more a master even of its poetic capabilities than the rarest poet then living could have been; and now that, all round our globe, there is not an unknown island left, we still reserve in our mental charts one such island, with the sea breaking round it, and we would part any day with ten of the heroes of antiquity rather than with Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday.

Besides Swift and Defoe, there were others of the literary cluster of Queen Anne's reign, and of that of George I., who might be included among the writers of prose fiction. Both Steele and Addison have left fine sketches which, though brief, are to be referred to this species of literature; in the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus* by Pope, Arbuthnot, and others, we have a literary satire on a thread of fictitious character and incident; and Arbuthnot's *History of John Bull* is a satiric political fiction of the hour, after the manner of Swift. Passing by these, however, and also those short novels of licentious incident by Mrs. Heywood and other followers of Aphra Behn, which are to be found bound up in old volumes, four or

five together, in the neglected shelves of large libraries, we alight, in the reign of George II., on a new group of British Novelists, remembered pre-eminently under that name. When we speak of the British Novelists of the Eighteenth Century, we think of Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne, and of the others as arranged round them. It is common even, in consideration of the great extension which the prose form of fiction received at their hands, to speak of them as the fathers of the present British Novel.

It was in the year 1740, nine years after Defoe's death, and when Swift was lingering on in the world as a speechless maniac under the care of his friends, that Richardson—a prosperous London printer, of a plump little figure and healthy complexion, who had lived to the age of fifty-one without distinguishing himself in any way, except as an upright and careful man of business, and a great favourite in a circle of ladies who used to visit at his house for the pleasure of hearing him talk—published his *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded.* He had been asked by two of his publishing friends, who knew his talent for letter-writing, to write "a little book of familiar letters on the useful concerns of common life;" but, on his setting himself to comply with the request, it

occurred to him, he says, that, if he wrote a *story* in an easy and natural manner, "he might possibly "introduce a new species of writing that might pos- "sibly turn young people into a course of reading "different from the pomp and parade of romance- "writing, and, dismissing the improbable and mar- "vellous, with which novels generally abound, might "tend to promote the cause of religion and virtue." Remembering to have heard many years before of a poor girl who, after resisting all the arts and persecution of a rich young squire, was honourably married to him and became an exemplary and accomplished lady, he framed a story, to the same intent, of honest Pamela Andrews resisting through ever so many pages the machinations of her young master for her ruin, till at last, foiled by her irreducible virtue, he is compelled to call in the clergyman, and she is rewarded by becoming his wife, riding in the coach drawn by the Flanders mares, and being introduced in her blushing beauty to all his great relations. The story, though long drawn out, according to our present ideas, was an immense advance, in point of interest, on the drowsy romance of the French classic school, and was read with avidity in families; while Richardson's claim to having invented in it a species of writing "enlisting the passions on

the side of virtue," was allowed by the unanimous voice of the clergy and of the strictest moralists of the time. Among the laughing young scapegraces of the day, however, the good printer was spoken of irreverently as "a solemn prig," and great fun was made of Pamela, her virtue, and its reward.

No one seems to have burst forth with heartier indignation against what, in this particular circle of readers, was called Richardson's sickly morality, than Harry Fielding, whose sisters were among Richardson's visitors and admirers. The son of a general, the great-grandson of an earl, and with many relatives among the aristocracy of the day, Fielding, now in his thirty-fourth year, was a tall, handsome, altogether magnificent fellow, with a face (if we may judge from his portrait by Hogarth) quite kingly in its aspect, and yet the very impersonation of reckless good-humour and abounding animal enjoyment. From his twentieth year—with the exception of a brief period after his marriage, when he lived as a country gentleman, and ran through a considerable fortune in horses, hounds, footmen in yellow liveries, and all kinds of extravagant hospitalities—he had lived loosely and precariously by his pen in London; scribbling off comedies and farces, editing Whig periodicals, smiting political

men with lampoons, diving into the taverns about Fleet Street and presiding there at roystering companies of actors and wits, and demeaning himself, under the annoyances of perpetual debt and perpetual want of money, with that serene indifference which comes of a happy temperament and of being the great-grandson of an earl. He was now a widower, after his first brief wedded life; and he had entered himself at the bar, with a view to some sinecure such as England provides for her nominal lawyers. Reading *Pamela,* this frank and manly humorist would not accept it at all; and by way of satire, and at the same timc to try his hand in the new kind of literature of which it was an example, he resolved to make it the subject of a parody. He accordingly schemed the *Adventures of Joseph Andrews*—Joseph being a footman and the supposed brother of Pamela, who, chiefly by keeping the excellent pattern of his sister's virtue before his eyes, is "enabled to preserve his purity" in the midst of similar temptations. Getting to like the story as he proceeded with it, Fielding was by no means steady to his original notion of producing a parody on Richardson; and the novel, when published in 1742, became popular on its own account.

Encouraged by his success, Fielding published, in

the following year (1743), another satiric fiction, of deeper, if less pleasing irony, in his *History of the Life of the late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great,* and a volume of miscellanies, containing his little-read allegory entitled *A Journey from this World to the next.* He then, for several years, reverted to political writing and writings for the stage. Richardson also, who resented Fielding's jest at his expense, and spoke bitterly to Fielding's own sisters of their brother's "continued lowness," had published nothing since the concluding part of his *Pamela.* In 1748, however, came forth Richardson's masterpiece, *Clarissa Harlowe*—twice as long as its predecessor, and written in the same form, as a series of letters, and with the same purpose of sustained and serious morality, but so much more elaborately wrought, and reaching, at the close, in the villainy of Lovelace and the irreparable wrongs of Clarissa, to such an agony of tragic interest, that the criticism even of Fielding and the other sons of humour was hushed in admiration of the consummate art. The nervous, tea-drinking, pompous little printer, coddled as he was by a bevy of admiring women, who nursed his vanity, as Johnson thought, by keeping him all to themselves, and letting nothing but praise come near him, had beaten, for the moment, the stalwart Fielding, rough-

ing it never so manfully among companions of the other sex, and invigorating his views of things with club-dinners and claret. The very next year, however (1749), Fielding gave to the world *his* masterpiece, in *Tom Jones, or the History of a Foundling;* and so the balance hung again between the two men, or rather between the two styles.

At this precise moment a third novelist had come into the field. This was Tobias Smollett, a young Scotchman of seven-and-twenty, who, after seeing some service in the navy as a surgeon's mate, had settled in London, with his West Indian wife, partly in hopes of medical practice, and partly with a view to authorship. He had been pestering the managers of theatres with a tragedy which he had written in Scotland, and had touched and retouched till he was tired of it; he had written two metrical satires; he had contributed to periodicals—all without success, when it occurred to him to make an attempt in the new kind of fiction which Richardson and Fielding were making popular. The result was his *Adventures of Roderick Random,* published in 1748, almost simultaneously with *Clarissa.* At first the book was attributed to Fielding; but it was soon known that there was a third Richard in the field.

In 1751 Smollett produced his *Peregrine Pickle,*

which is twice as long as his first novel, and, in my opinion, much superior. In the same year, Fielding, who had in the meantime received a small pension and the post of a paid police-magistrate, published his last novel, *Amelia.* Richardson followed, in 1753, with his *Sir Charles Grandison*, in which, to correct the partiality with which, as he had heard, his fair readers regarded Lovelace, the villain of his previous novel, he depicted his ideal of a Christian gentleman, such as ladies ought preferably to admire. Smollett, in the same year, added his third novel, *The Adventures of Ferdinand, Count Fathom.* At this point Fielding dropped out of the triumvirate—dying at Lisbon, whither he had gone for the benefit of his health, in his forty-eighth year.

The veteran Richardson and young Dr. Smollett were now, in public esteem (though Richardson would have disdained the association), the surviving representatives of the British novel. Neither seemed disposed to add anything, in the way of fiction, to what he had already produced—Richardson, content with his laurels and occupying himself in writing letters from his shy seclusion to his lady-correspondents; and Smollett betaking himself to historical compilations, translations, the editing of reviews, and other labours which broke his health and

tried his irascible temper. In the interval appeared a fourth writer of fiction—the Rev. Laurence Sterne, an Irishman by birth, and a Yorkshire clergyman by profession, but with a somewhat unclerical, if not a cracked reputation. In 1759, when forty-six years of age, he published the first two volumes of his *Tristram Shandy*, a work delivered to the public by instalments, and not completed, as it stands, till 1767. Richardson, who had lived to see the début of this new interloper, and to like him as little as the others, died in 1761; and Smollett and Sterne were left together. Smollett's fourth novel, his *Sir Launcelot Greaves*, published in 1762, did little to maintain his reputation; and to those who judged from Smollett's broken health and spirits, it might have seemed that Sterne, though the older man, would have the last of it. But it was not so. Sterne, having completed his *Tristram Shandy*, and having published also six volumes of sermons, was engaged in 1768 in the publication of his *Sentimental Journey* (the fruit of a continental tour which he had made some years before), when he died in a London inn. Smollett, who had been at death's door, but had recovered by a two years' stay abroad (his published account of which was supposed to have suggested Sterne's *Journey* by way of contrast), lived to write

two novels more. His *Adventures of an Atom*, published in 1769, was, indeed, rather a fierce political allegory in the style of Swift than a novel; but in 1771, when he was a poor dying invalid at Leghorn, he flashed out again in the last, and perhaps the best, of all his fictions, the *Expedition of Humphry Clinker*. Besides being a novel, it is the record of the leal-hearted Scot's last visit to his native land. It was written while, as his breath grew fainter under the kindly Italian sky, all his intervening years of toil and trouble faded from his fancy as a dream, and he was again a boy, with life bright before him, glorying in Wallace and Bruce, walking in the streets of Glasgow, fishing by the banks of the Leven, or boating on the breast of Lochlomond. When Smollett died, he was but fifty years of age.

Of the four writers of fiction, whose historical relations to each other I have thus sketched, the priority in time belongs to Richardson. With this priority of time there go certain attributes distinguishing him conspicuously from the others.

We do not read Richardson's novels much now; and it cannot be helped that we do not. There are the novels of a hundred years between us and him; time is short; and novels of eight or ten volumes, written in the tedious form of letters, and recording

conversations and meditations in which the story creeps on inch by inch, without so much as an unexpected pistol-shot or a trick of Harlequin and Pantaloon to relieve the attention, have little chance against the brisker and broader fictions to which we have been accustomed. We have to remember, however, not only that, a hundred years ago, Richardson's novels were read everywhere, both in Britain and on the continent, with a protracted sense of fascination, a leisurely intensity of interest, such as no British author of prose stories had ever commanded before, but also that almost every thoughtful critic who has read Richardson since has spoken of him as, all in all, one of the masters of our literature. Johnson would not allow Fielding to be put in comparison with Richardson; and, whenever Lord Macaulay names Richardson, it is as a kind of prose Shakespeare.

When we read Richardson for ourselves, we can see the reasons which have led to so high an opinion. His style of prose fiction is perhaps more original than that of any other novelist we have had. I have alluded already to the influence of foreign precedent on the course of our fictitious literature. There was foreign precedent for Sidney's "Arcadia" in Italian and Spanish pastoral romances; for Boyle's "Parth-

enissa" in the French classical romances; for the amatory novelettes of the Restoration and the subsequent age in French and Italian tales; for Swift's satiric fictions in Rabelais; and even for some of Defoe's narrations in the Spanish picaresque novel. In the self-taught Bunyan alone have we found a notion of a romance not borrowed directly from any precedent; and yet the *genus* Allegory, to which Bunyan's romance belongs, is one which he knew to exist, and of which there had been specimens he had never heard of. To Richardson, more than to Bunyan might be assigned the deliberate invention of a new form of literary art, "a new species of writing." In this respect it was in his favour that he knew no other tongue than his own, that even in English literature his reading had been select rather than extensive, and that his life had been that of a grave, shrewd, and rather retiring citizen, not sophisticated in his literary taste by second-hand notions of literary method picked up at clubs of wits, or amid the effects and clap-traps of theatres. Towards the end of his life, his longest journey was from his printing-office in Salisbury Court, to his suburban house at Hammersmith or at Parson's Green; and, in his daily walks in the park or in the streets, he was to be seen, according to his own

description sent to a lady, as a neatly-dressed little figure, with his left hand in his bosom, and his right holding rather than using a cane, "looking directly "foreright, as passers-by would imagine, but observing "all that stirred on either hand of him, without "moving his short neck." When, by a kind of accident, he was called upon to task a faculty for constructing stories, for which he had had a reputation in his boyhood, but which had lain dormant since, this very narrowness of his direct acquaintance with the conventional life and the casual literature of his time, helped him to be inventive and original.

It has been remarked by some one that the knowledge of Man is something different from what is called knowledge of men, and that writers who are strong in the one may be but moderately provided with the other. The remark is not expressed in the best manner; but it points to a truth. It was something to the same effect that Johnson had in view when he maintained that Richardson painted "characters of nature," whereas Fielding painted only "characters of manners." The meaning is that a man who is much thrown about in society, meets with so many facts, characters, incidents, physiognomies, and oddities already made to his hands, that, if he has but an eye and a memory for these, he may take them

as they flit before him in their superficial variety, and, by reproducing them in certain arrangements and proportions in a work of fiction, obtain credit, and not unjustly, for representing contemporary life. The process, in such a case, is that which Ben Jonson called "collecting the humours of men"—that is, taking up actual life in striking flakes and patches from the surface of the passing time. But there is another process than this, belonging to a higher art of fiction. It is when a writer fastens his attention on the central mechanism of human nature, selects the primary springs and forces of action, and works outwards to the medley of external effects through the imagined operation of these springs and forces in certain collocations, contrasts, and oppositions. This is Shakespeare's method; and its capabilities are best seen in him, because *he* certainly cannot be charged with neglecting the humours of men, or with having a dull eye or recollection for any order of external facts and particulars whatsoever. The truth is, in such cases the external facts and oddities do strike as vividly and miscellaneously as on any man; but, as they strike, they suggest the mechanism which causes them and casts them up, and this mechanism is conceived as causing them and casting them up, precisely as, by a real mech-

anician, the motions on the dial-plate of a watch are seen as the working of the complex interior. The difference between the two methods in result is, in reality, the difference between the historical and the poetical, the temporary and the permanent, in art. He who delineates only "characters of manners," ceases to interest, except historically, when the manners he has delineated have vanished from the earth; but he who delineates "characters of nature"—who paints not the avaricious man and the vain man peculiar to his own time, and picked up as ready-made curiosities, apparelled in this or that manner, but avarice and vanity taking flesh in his time—will interest historically also, inasmuch as he cannot choose but work in passing fact and circumstance, but will grasp the human heart when avarice no longer takes the form of tax-farming, and when vanity has abandoned hoops and hair-powder.

While, in Shakespeare's case, the deeper method was adopted simply as the method natural to poetic genius, it is possible that, in Richardson's, the very limitation of his acquaintance with the facts and manners of his time may have contributed to the result. Not having ranged over a wide surface of actual life, so as to have accumulated in much variety recollections of actual incidents, physiogno-

mies, scenes, and characters, to be introduced into his novels, he was obliged, in constructing his stories, to set out from his experience of human nature in its essential principles (in which experience men may be sound and deep without a very wide acquaintance at first hand with passing manners), and, placing certain imagined characters in certain imagined situations, to divine what *would* take place by their working on together. This is, accordingly, what Richardson does. He places a girl who is to be his heroine, or a man who is to be his hero, in a certain imagined situation, and in imaginary relations to other personages—parents, uncles, aunts, and other ladies and gentlemen close to the family-group; he sets these persons in motion, exhibiting slowly, in letters which pass among them, their approximations, recessions, and feelings towards each other; from time to time he throws in a fresh incident or a new character to complicate the history; and so on he creeps to the catastrophe or the consummation. His peculiar power consists throughout in the subtle imagination of progressive states of feeling rather than of changing external scenes; in the minute anatomy of the human heart as worked upon gradually by little alterations of time, place, and motive, rather than in the rapid succession of

external visions and surprises. He adheres to his original group of personages, following them hither and thither, when locomotion is necessary, from town to country, and from country back to town, and taking note of such faces as are added to the group during these migrations—very minute, too, in his descriptions of dress, look, and gesture, as far as these personages are concerned, and of the houses and gardens in which they move; but bringing in no breadth of contiguous life or landscape; and, on the whole, carrying his characters on through the story in a little independent world, with which, whatever the tyranny or the misery within, surrounding society has slight connexions and does not interfere. This disconnexion of his characters and their history from the surrounding medium in which they are supposed to be moving is the main cause of whatever improbability or want of truth to fact is charged against Richardson. One feels that a good shrill shriek from the heroine at her chamber-window, or an appeal by any one in her confidence to the nearest magistrate, or the behaviour of any one of the persons simply as men or women would behave with the British law and the British customs of the eighteenth century in operation round about them, would cut the novel short at any point of its pro-

gress. Allow Richardson this disconnexion, however —let him have his characters as he fancies them, isolated as he fancies them, and inter-related as he fancies them—and his art in their government is admirable. He writes on and on in a plain, full, somewhat wordy style, not always grammatically perfect; but every page is a series of minute touches, and each touch is from a thorough conception of the case which he is representing. In minute inquisition into the human heart, and especially the female heart, and in the exhibition of conduct as affected from day to day by growing complications of feeling and circumstance, Richardson is a master. So entirely is his plan that of minute representation of feeling in its progress that his characters scarcely stand before us at the close as impressive creations or individual portraitures. We remember his Pamela, his Clarissa, his Lovelace, and so on; but we remember them rather as names for certain protracted courses of action or suffering than as beings flashed at once upon the imagination in their complete appearance and equipments. It is significant of Richardson's general method that the principal male character of his first novel should have no other name from first to last than that of "Mr. B." What chance has such an anonymous gentleman

among the crowds of ideal personages, more distinctly named, that readers of novels carry about in their recollection? Fielding wickedly availed himself of the blank by changing "Mr. B." in his *Joseph Andrews* into "Squire Booby."

A peculiarity of Richardson, advertised by himself again and again as a radical difference between him and most of his predecessors and contemporaries, was that he made all his fictions serve "the cause of religion and virtue." This merit, in the sense in which he claimed it, can hardly be denied to him. He does not shrink from recognising immorality, its institutions, and its consequences to society; his stories turn on such recognition; and there are passages in his novels, which, though they were read aloud in families when they first appeared, it would be difficult to read aloud in families now, inasmuch as the matters to which they refer are not esteemed such necessary subjects of domestic discourse as they once were. Honestly, however, and as a really pious and strict man, whose tastes, as well as his convictions, were in favour of propriety, Richardson did, in every line that he wrote, endeavour to inculcate the established rules of individual and social ethics, and to represent deviations from them as censurable. Richardson's ethical teaching has,

indeed, been spoken of by some of our best authorities as none of the highest in kind. "I do loathe "the cant," says Coleridge, "which can recommend "*Pamela* and *Clarissa Harlowe* as strictly moral, "while *Tom Jones* is prohibited as loose. There is in "the latter a cheerful, sun-shiny, breezy spirit that "prevails everywhere, strongly contrasted with the "close, hot, day-dreamy continuity of Richardson." This is an opinion from a good quarter, and one can easily see on what it was founded. In *Pamela*, more especially, the knowingness of the girl in the midst of her trials and her virtue, and the satisfaction of the author and of herself in the species of reward assigned to her at the last, are not calculated according to the most heroic known definitions of the moral sense. "Virtue is the best policy," "Hold out and he may marry you"—such, so far as the moral can be expressed separately, is the apparent moral of that novel. Such prudential morality, however, may, in the absence of what is more elevated, be very good working morality in this world; and, as a serious and minute casuist in it, Richardson cannot but do good. And, after all, the question in what the moral effect of a work of fiction consists is far more complex and difficult than may be usually supposed. The moral effect of a

novel or a poem, or any work of the kind, lies not so much in any specific proposition that can be extracted out of it as its essence, and appended to it in the shape of an ethical summary, as in the whole power of the work in all its parts to stir and instruct the mind, in the entire worth of the thoughts which it suggests, and in the number and intensity of the impressions which it leaves. The addition which it makes to the total mind, the turn or wrench which it gives to the mind, the collection of impressive pictures which it hangs on the walls of the imagination—these are the measures of its value even morally. Of Richardson's novels no one will deny that they stir the mind powerfully, or at least pain it keenly, as they are read. There are in our language few such highly wrought histories of domestic English life; and no one has written in prose, histories of modern domestic incident approaching more nearly in pathetic and tragic effect to the old metrical dramas in which the themes were taken from more ancient and ideal ground. Nor is Richardson's idea of the proper conduct of events in his novels in order to a good effect on the mind that vulgar one which might be thoughtlessly attributed to him in virtue of the scheme of his *Pamela*. The moral of his *Clarissa*, for example, is not virtue

rewarded, but virtue triumphant, even in death and infamy. There was something truly superior in the firmness with which the nervous old printer persisted, in spite of the remonstrances of his lady-correspondents, in not making that novel end happily in the reformation of Lovelace and his marriage to Clarissa, but tragically, as one for the ideal elements of which there could be no terrestrial reconciliation.

A more just objection to Richardson's novels than that on which Coleridge and others insist, if indeed their objection does not resolve itself into this, is the limited portion of the field of human circumstance with which they concern themselves. They are all, in the main, romances of love and its consequences. A hero and a heroine are connected by love, on one side, or on both sides, or a hero is so connected with two heroines; and the novel is the slow unfolding of the consequences on to an appropriate termination. Now, though this is the practice, not of Richardson alone, but of the majority of modern novelists, and especially of lady-novelists, it is worthy of consideration that the novel is thereby greatly contracted in its capabilities as a form of literature. Perhaps, however, we can well afford one eminent novelist, such as Richardson, to the exclusive literary service of so important an interest. He had qualified him-

self as few have done for the service. In his early boyhood he had been employed by several young women to write their love letters for them; and so he had acquired an early insight into the forms and intricacies of the tender passion and all its modes of strategy. He had been twice married, and had had two families of sons and daughters; and all his life long he had been more in the society of women than of men, and had had the confidence of ladies of all ages, and of different ranks. He was, therefore, a master of love, or, at least, of the feminine variety of the passion, in all its minutiæ; and, when he wrote, it was of that of which he had most knowledge. And yet, curiously enough, his own notions of the passion which he illustrated so elaborately were all in favour of its abatement or rational regulation. He is no friend to elopements, or to anything not strictly sensible and reasonable. He would have converted Queen Venus herself into an intelligent and matronly lady of calm gait and aspect; and he would have clipped the wings of Cupid, dressed him perforce in a green tunic with gilt buttons, and made him walk behind his mother as a page carrying the prayer-book. Once, in grave jest, he shocked one of his lady-correspondents by arguing that perhaps some of the mischiefs and social anomalies

caused by unregulated love might disappear if society could at any future time be arranged on a principle of legalised polygamy.

The most obvious distinction between Richardson on the one hand, and Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne on the other, is that they belong, all three of them, to the class of Humorists, while he does not rank naturally in that class. Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne, as you know, are included by Mr. Thackeray in his gallery of the "Humorists of the Eighteenth Century;" but Richardson has no place in that gallery.

On this distinction, were this the proper place for a full discussion of it, much might have to be said. The fact on which it rests is simply this,—that, while many writers view things seriously, and set themselves to narrate events, or to enforce doctrines, or to frame imaginary histories, in a spirit of straightforward earnestness, there are in every age also writers who set themselves to the same or to corresponding tasks with a smile on their faces and a sense of fun and irony at their hearts, and who, accordingly, either select out of the miscellany of things such as are confessedly laughable, or represent all things so as to bring laughter out of them. Stated more deeply, the fact is, that anything whatever may

be looked at and considered in two ways—gravely and seriously, or ironically and with reference to something else which shall cause it to seem comical; and that some minds tend constitutionally to the one mode of thought and others to the other. As to the relative worth or power for ultimate good of the two modes of thinking, it would be bold for any man to pronounce an opinion offhand. One may certainly agree with Goethe when he says that the predominance of the humorous spirit in the literature of any period is a sign of approaching decrepitude; and I do not know but that at present, when comic literature seems to be in ascendancy among us, and when even our men of greatest talent find it necessary to wear the cap and bells, it might be well to bear that observation of the German sage in mind. And yet —as none knew better than Goethe—a certain proportion of humorists among the literary men of any period is a sign and requisite of intellectual health; and the very nature of humour is such that a preponderance of that quality in any individual may be consistent with the finest genius and the greatest speculative capacity. Is it not now a commonplace in our philosophy of character that humour, in its highest kind, has its origin beside the very fountain of tears, in that sense of things

invisible, that perpetual reference of the evanescent present to the everlasting and inconceivable, which is the one invariable constituent of all that we call genius? When we name, too, some of the greatest humorists, usually so called, that the world has produced—Aristophanes, Horace, Rabelais, Cervantes, Molière, Swift, Burns, Jean Paul, Béranger—do we not feel that men of this class may be pre-eminently great, and that their function in the thought of the world may be, if not always beneficent in appearance, yet sometimes beautifully so, and always really wholesome and corrective? Were not some of them masters of song also, and sons of mystery and sorrow? And though, in opposition to them, there may be named men more uniformly majestic, in whom humour seemed to be as deficient as in some of them it was excessive—men like Dante, and Milton, and Schiller, and Wordsworth—yet do we not reserve, even against these examples, as something balancing the account, the fact that in others of the topmost and most comprehensive men—in Plato, in Chaucer, in Shakespeare, in Goethe, in Scott—humour was present, sometimes to the extent of half their genius? On the whole, perhaps, what Goethe meant was, that there is a condition of things in which the humorous spirit in literature will reign by a kind

of necessity as the only spirit that can find suitable nutriment, and that such a condition of things, whenever it appears, betrays an exhaustion of the social energy. Whatever he meant, his saying, I think, has a significance for us now in Britain. Perhaps could we wish, in this age of abounding wits and humorists, for that which, from its very rarity, would do us most good, it would be for the appearance among us of a great soul that could not or would not laugh at all, whose every tone and syllable should be serious, and whose face should front the world with something of that composed sublimity of look which our own Milton wore, when his eyes rolled in darkness in quest of suns and systems, or of that pitiful and scornful melancholy which art has fixed, for the reprehension of frivolity for ever, in the white mask of the Italian Dante.

Whether such a wish would have been as fitting a century ago, I will not venture to say. It is enough to note that then already for some seventy years the humorous spirit had prevailed in British literature, and shown itself in forms of composition, both in verse and in prose, but more particularly in prose, which could not but be received as important additions to the stock of British authorship; and that still, under Johnson's literary dictatorship, the

same spirit of humour was at work, urging to the production of new prose forms. The most characteristic of these forms was the comic prose-fiction of Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne. Of these three writers, Fielding and Smollett go together as most nearly akin, leaving Sterne apart as a humorist of distinct character.

Though Fielding's first motive towards the style of fiction which he introduced was that of ridiculing Richardson, it is very clear, from his preface to *Joseph Andrews*, that he was aware of the novelty of his experiment, and had a distinct theory of the capabilities of the new form of writing of which it was to be an example. In that preface he distinctly refers prose fiction of every kind to the epic order of Poetry, and defines the comic novel to be the comic prose epic. "The Epic," he says, "as well as "the Drama, is divided into Tragedy and Comedy:.. "And, further, as this Poetry may be tragic or "comic, I will not scruple to say it may be likewise "either in verse or in prose; for, though it wants "one particular which the critic enumerates in the "constituent parts of an Epic poem, viz. Metre, yet "when any kind of writing contains all its other "parts, such as Fable, Action, Characters, Senti-"ments, and Diction, and is deficient in Metre only,

"it seems, I think, reasonable to refer it to the "Epic—at least, as no critic hath thought proper to "range it under any other head, or to assign it a "particular name to itself. Thus the Telemachus of "the Archbishop of Cambray appears to me of the "epic kind, as well as the Odyssey of Homer. . . . "Now, a Comic Romance is a Comic Epic Poem in "prose." He then goes on to distinguish between the genuine Comic Novel, such as he meant to introduce, and the Burlesque—this last being, as he defines it, a caricature of Nature, a representation of things monstrous and unnatural, in order to produce ludicrous effect. Without denying the legitimacy of such a mode of Art, whether in literature or in painting, and stipulating, moreover, that in his "diction" he may sometimes avail himself of the trick of the burlesque, he yet announces that in the true comic fiction, as he has conceived it, there must be no caricature in the "sentiments" or the "characters," but the closest truth to nature. "Perhaps," he says, "there is one reason why a comic "writer should, of all others, be the least excused for "deviating from nature—since it may not be always "so easy for a serious poet to meet with the great "and admirable; but life everywhere furnishes an "accurate observer with the ridiculous." The ridi-

culous in human life, according to Fielding, is the proper matter for the comic novelist; but, lest this definition should seem too vague, he proceeds to say that, in his view, the only source of the true ridiculous is *affectation;* which, again, may exist in one of two forms—that of Vanity, or that of Hypocrisy. The multiform exhibitions in human society of Affectation arising from Vanity, or of Affectation arising from Hypocrisy—these, he concludes, and these alone, supply the comic novelist, or writer of the comic prose epic, with his legitimate material.

I do not think that this definition of the objects of the Ridiculous is philosophically sufficient. I believe that there are materials for the comic in nature as well as in human life—that there may be something laughable in the way in which a tree bends its branches, or a leaf is blown by the wind, or a dog runs to a well; and, consequently, that many things are ludicrous in life, the ludicrousness of which cannot be resolved into vanity or hypocrisy or any sort of affectation. In Fielding's own novels, I believe, there are examples of the ludicrous which would not square with his theory. That he should have heralded his first novel, however, by a theory so fully reasoned forth and propounded with such an air of critical exactness, shows that he wished the

public to understand that he was consciously initiating a new kind of writing.

Not that he pretended to absolute originality. The very title-page of his first novel indicated the contrary. It ran thus: "The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his friend Mr. Abraham Adams, written in imitation of the manner of Cervantes, author of Don Quixote." In all the subsequent novels of Fielding the influence of Cervantes is visible. It is not less visible in the novels of Smollett, who, coming in the wake of Fielding, may be considered to have accepted, without re-proclaiming, Fielding's already published definition of the Comic Novel, and to have offered himself as a second candidate for the honours of that style of fiction. One of Smollett's literary achievements was a new translation of "Don Quixote;" and the plot of one of his novels—*Sir Launcelot Greaves*—is that of "Don Quixote," slightly changed. But, though Cervantes may be regarded as the acknowledged prototype of both Fielding and Smollett, one sees in them also much of the influence of an intermediate writer of fiction nearer their own age. This is the Frenchman Le Sage (1668–1747) whose *Gil Blas* and other novels—reproductions in French by a man of original genius of the spirit and matter of the

Spanish picaresque novels—were already familiar in Britain. Both Fielding and Smollett would also have acknowledged their obligations to other older humourists and writers of fiction, native and foreign.

To both Fielding and Smollett it may be allowed that their novels fulfilled, more completely than Richardson's, in respect of the variety of their contents, that definition of the novel which demands that it should, whether serious or comic, be the prose counterpart of the Epic. They are, as regards superficial extent of matter, more nearly the comic prose epics of their time than Richardson's are its serious prose epics. In each of them there is a love story, threading the incidents together; but to the right and to the left of this story, and all along its course, interrupting it, and sometimes all but obliterating it, are fragments of miscellaneous British life, or even European life, humorously represented. There are varying breadths of landscape; characters of all kinds come in; interests of all kinds are recognised; the reader is not perpetually on the rack in watching the feelings of the hero and the heroine, but is entertained with continual episodes, rambles, and social allusions.

Hence, for one thing, the novels of Fielding and Smollett are far more amusing, in the popular sense

of the word, than those of Richardson. If Richardson's had been an advance, in point of interest, from the tedious romances of a former age, Fielding's and Smollett's must have seemed to the reading public of that day a still greater triumph in the art of literary entertainment. It was like providing a capital comedy, or a very rich farce, to come after the serious piece of the evening, and to begin when, though some of the graver auditors might be departing, the theatre was sure to be filled to overflowing by the rush at half-price. The art of prose entertainment has been carried much farther since those days; but even now, *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, and *Humphry Clinker*, are novels nearly as amusing as any we have; and, if so, what must our great grandfathers have thought of them? In them for the first time British literature possessed compositions making any approach, in breadth, bustle and variety of interest to that form of literature, always theoretically possible, and of which other countries had already had specimens in "Don Quixote" and "Gil Blas,"—the comic prose epic of contemporary life. All the elements of interest pointed out by common-place critical tradition as necessary in the complete epic were here more or less present, in so far as these elements

could take on the comic hue. There was, first, the "fable," more or less amusing in itself. Then there were the "characters," all genuine additions in the comic, or serio-comic style, to the gallery of ideal portraits bequeathed to the British imagination by the creative genius of former writers, and some of them such masterpieces of physiognomic skill, as at once to take conspicuous places in the gallery, and become favourites both with artists and with the public: — from Fielding, his Parson Adams, his Squire Western, his Mr. Allworthy, his Philosopher Square, his Parson Thwackum, his Partridge, his Amelia, &c.; and from Smollett, his Strap, his Tom Bowling, his Apothecary Morgan, his Commodore Trunnion, his Jack Hatchway, his Tom Pipes, his Matthew Bramble, his Aunt Tabitha and her maid Jenkins, and his Scotch lieutenant Lismahago. In the "scenes," also, through which these characters were led—country-scenes and town-scenes, sea-scenes and land-scenes, scenes at home and scenes abroad, tavern-scenes and prison-scenes, scenes in haunts of London debauchery, and scenes in fashionable pump-rooms and ball-rooms — the reader has certainly amusement enough for his money. Then there were the "sentiments," as the critics called them—the opinions of the authors, brought out by the way,

and delivered seriously or ironically; the passing strokes of humour and invective; the dialogues, dissertations, digressions, and short essays, on all things and sundry. Lastly, in the matter of "diction," so far as that could be thought of as a separate matter, there was all the general pleasure that could be derived from very good writing, by authors of practised talent, who had acquired a strong easy manner of their own, distinguishing them from other writers, and who could not pen many sentences together without some witty turn of fancy, or some sharp felicity of phrase.

And yet, with all this superiority of Fielding and Smollett to Richardson, in breadth of epic interest after the comic fashion—the kind of superiority, as I have said, that would attract, and justly attract a full theatre, in a very rich and broad comedy, presented as after piece to a serious and harrowing drama of domestic incident—one can see on what grounds some critics might still prefer Richardson. This might be done, even although much store were not set on the greater formality of Richardson's ethics, and critics were to agree with Coleridge in his opinion, that, notwithstanding the frequent coarseness of the scenes and the language in Fielding and Smollett, there is more of manly health in their

general views of things than in those of the pompous little printer, cogitating his histories of virtue in his hot parlour at Parson's Green, and reading them bit by bit at the tea-table to a circle of listening ladies.

Such an opinion might be entertained even on grounds of biographical knowledge. Fielding, with all his faults and all his recklessness, was a manly great-hearted fellow, with more of the right heroic blood and true kingly talent in him, though he did but occupy a police bench, and live by his wits, than was to be found in the Austrian Hapsburgs, with whom he counted kin; and we see Mr. Thackeray (as good a judge of character as any man), stretching his hand through the intervening century, and grasping the hand of Fielding, as of the man in that time whom he could, on the whole, like best. Need we say that Fielding would have returned the grasp with interest? And so, with a difference, of Smollett. He was by no means the idle half-reprobate he represents in his Roderick Random. He was often wrong and always irascible, continually fancying himself aggrieved, and always with a quarrel on his hands; but he was as proud, warm-hearted, and mettlesome a Scot as had then crossed the Tweed—of a spirit so independent, we

are told, that he never asked a favour for himself from any great man in his life; paying his way honestly, and helping liberally those about him who were in distress; and altogether, so far from being a mere pleasure-seeker, that there was probably no man then in or near London, who stayed more at home, or worked more incessantly and laboriously to prevent the world from being a shilling the worse for him. He ruined his health by over-work.

Such being the men, it can hardly be supposed, even if we allow for the effects of a lax literary conscience, or of a desire to write what would sell, that the novels which the men wrote could be intrinsically immoral. There are, doubtless, passages in them which we should not like to see read by "young ladies in white muslin;" and this is a pity. But, if the test of endurable literature were that it should always and in every part be fit to read, or to be fancied as read, by young ladies in white muslin, what a bonfire of books there would have to be, and what a sacrifice to the susceptibilities of white muslin of tons of literary matter, both historical and fictitious, very innocent and very instructive for veteran philosophers in broad-cloth, for medical and moral students, and for plain rustics in corduroys! There may surely be "*carmina non prius audita*" which

even a "*Musarum sacerdos*" might think it fit to sing, though not "*virginibus puerisque.*" This consideration, it is true, will not absolve Fielding and Smollett from blame, seeing that they knew well enough that girls and boys were likely to be the majority of their audience, and seeing, moreover, that in what they addressed to others, one cannot always find that they kept themselves strictly up to the highest possibilities of the occasion. Still, taking all things into account—the legitimacy in literature of much that may not be fit for family reading, the difference of taste in that age as to what *was* fit for family reading, and Richardson's own offences in this respect according to the modern standard—it is not on this particular ground that the shrewdest admirers of Richardson would contend in his favour. They would rather do so, I fancy, on the ground occupied by Johnson on the same question, when he argued that Richardson's style of art was the deeper, inasmuch as he painted "characters of nature," while Fielding and Smollett painted chiefly "characters of manners."

For my part, I cannot deny that I feel something of this difference, though perhaps scarcely to the extent in which it was asserted by Johnson. It does seem to me that both Fielding and Smollett—

broader as they are than Richardson, more rich, more various, more interesting—did work more according to the method of sheer superficial observation and the record of humours presented to their hand, and less according to the method of ideal development from within outwards. Both Fielding and Smollett seem to me to have been men of true humour, of true heart and genius, who, having betaken themselves to story-writing, and making it their main object to be popular and amusing, did not trouble themselves very severely with human nature in its depths and intricacies, but seized incidents, characters, and current beliefs, as they were presented in the actual whirl of British life in their time, revelling in comic plenty of all sorts, rather than caring for ideal unity or ultimate truth, and only now and then, when they struck out an original character like Squire Western or Commodore Trunnion, or when by chance they fell upon a vein of feeling constitutionally strong in themselves, reaching the poetic, the general, the truly elemental.

It is consistent with what has been just said as to the predominance of the historical over the poetic method in Fielding and Smollett, that both of them make so much use in their novels of the device of locomotion. They move their characters about,

carrying them from inn to inn along country-roads, from London to the extremities of Britain, and back again to London; and by this means they make a rapid succession of scenes and circumstances pass before the reader's view, without much necessity for preserving a connexion in the series. How many both of Fielding's and of Smollett's scenes are laid in country inns! Now, although this is one of the old epic methods, as in the Odyssey, and although in "Don Quixote" the same method is followed, and Spain is brought before us as the region of the wanderings of the Knight and his attendant Squire, it is yet a method likely to be resorted to in many cases, simply as admitting the largest superficial variety of scenes and incidents with the least trouble to the thorough imagination. It is in itself a fine method, having certain advantages over the other; and, indeed, where the story is that of the adventures of an individual, or of one or two persons, and not that of a national enterprise, the natural epic precedent will be the Odyssey and not the Iliad. No fair critic, however, will venture to say that Fielding, and much less that Smollett, has used the method with so much of true poetic mastery as Cervantes. They lead their heroes about over Britain and the Continent, and thus, while narrating the adventures

of these heroes, they make physiognomies, events and objects of all kinds flit in profusion before the reader's eyes; but one sees frequently that these are brought in on their own account to add to the general fund of amusement, and that they might have been brought in equally well had the work been a historical picture of British and Continental manners, and not the story of the adventures of such imaginary beings as Tom Jones and Peregrine Pickle.

In the very circumstance, however, that the novels of Fielding and Smollett contain so much that is merely historical delineation, they have a peculiar interest for us now. They are, in many respects, more full and vivid accounts of British manners in the middle of the eighteenth century than are to be found in the professed histories of the period. I think all of you will agree with me that, if we accept them as true accounts, we would rather remain in our own century, with all its inconveniences, than go back into such a state of things as that over which George II. reigned, and George III. for a time, and in which our great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers moved and had their being. What an unwholesome atmosphere, what filth, what riot, what social cruelty and confusion! Here is the programme of one of the chapters in a novel of Smollett's :—

"I am visited by Freeman, with whom I appear in public and am caressed—Am sent for by Lord Quiverwit, whose presence I put in a passion—Narcissa is carried off by her brother—I intend to pursue him and am dissuaded by my friend—Engage in play and lose all my money—Set out for London—Try my fortune at the gaming-table without success—Receive a letter from Narcissa—Bilk my tailor."

This is a sample of British life a hundred years ago, as represented in Smollett's novels. In Fielding the element is not, on the whole, quite so coarse; but in him, too, there is so much of the same kind of scenery and incident that we see that both novelists were painting life and manners as they thought they saw them. As we read, we cannot always avoid squeamishness. The highwaymen, the stupid country justices, the brutality and tyranny of men in office, the Draconic state of the laws and their foul administration, the executions, the nests of thieves in large towns—all this we can accept in the aggregate as but older forms of what we have amongst ourselves; but, when we get into a country inn, or into a prison, or into a mean London ordinary, and have its worst minutiæ thrust upon our senses—or when, as is the case in every other page, we see the hero and a few of the other personages in some such locality, engaged in a fight, and shins are kicked and heads broken, and the parson has a tub of hog's blood or some equally delicious fluid thrown

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over him by an enraged landlady, and caps and underclothing are torn off in the fray, and we hear oaths and certain now unutterable anatomical allusions in every sentence from man or woman—then our very disgust makes us sceptical as to the truth of the representation, and we ask ourselves, "Whatever the century, *can* this have been British life?" In a certain sense, we are obliged to conclude that it was. To authorize the conclusion, we have but to compare Fielding with Smollett, and both with their contemporary Hogarth, and all three with others of the same time who have left us reports of external manners more professedly historical. Nay, we have but to recollect what squalor, what horrors for the ear and the eye, our own generation carries in it—shut down under hatches, it may be, but still part and parcel of contemporary reality—to be aware that, if all life now were thrown up into literature by spade and mattock on the plan of literal representation of facts individually, it might seem as if the age of the early Georges was not after all more uninhabitable by sensitive minds than the present, and as if every age carried about the same amount of disagreeable matter in it as every other, though with variations, not unimportant, as to the manner and the place of stowage. And here occurs an observation which I

think might be largely verified. It depends, I believe, very much on the style of art in which any age chooses to hand down the tradition of itself whether that age shall seem in after times a delightful one to have lived in. Shakespeare and Ben Jonson were contemporaries; and Shakespeare, though he threw his fictions into the past, wove them out of his experience of present human nature. I appeal to any reader of the two poets whether, if he could belong either to Shakespeare's world or to Ben Jonson's, he would not at once choose Shakespeare's. Does it not seem as if life would have been a much more healthy, a much more delightful thing in the one than in the other—as if to have co-existed with Falstaff even, and gone about with him in London and Windsor, albeit with Pistol swaggering in the company and the fire of Bardolph's nose to light one through the streets, would have been to live in a more genial and enjoyable set of conditions, with greater spiritual freedom in one's self, and a finer environment of all the human virtues in others, than would have been possible if Ben Jonson's social accounts of the same age are to be received as more truly authentic? They *are* authentic; but they are authentic after the historic method of art, which takes life in the particular; and Shakespeare's repre-

sentations are truer still, more deeply and thoroughly true, because they are after the poetic method, which takes life in the general and the invariable. And so with the age of the early Georges. If the life of that time, as it is presented in the pages of Fielding and Smollett and in the pictures of Hogarth, seems such that we would rather remain where we are and be ourselves at any disadvantage than go back to be our great-grandfathers, yet we have other representations of life at the same period in which, simply because they are poetically just, all seems happier and sweeter. Inasmuch, however, as we have fewer commemorations of that age by itself in the poetical than in the historical style of art, may not the inference be to its actual disadvantage? This would be to say that an age which has not left us a sufficiency of poetical as well as of real representations of itself cannot have been fundamentally a genial or beautiful one. Perhaps so it is.

On a comparison of Fielding with Smollett it is easy to point out subordinate differences between them. Critics have done this abundantly and accurately enough. Smollett, they tell us, is even more historical in his method, deals more in actual observation and reminiscence, and less in invention and combination of reminiscence, than Fielding.

His notion of a story, still more than Fielding's, is that of a traveller, moving over a certain extent of ground, and through a succession of places, each full of things to be seen and of odd physiognomies to be quizzed. Fielding's construction is the more careful and well considered, his evolution of his story the more perfect and harmonious, his art altogether the more classic and exquisite. His humour too, is the finer and more subtle, like that of a well-wrought comedy; while Smollett's is the coarser and more outrageous like that of a broad farce. Both are satirists; but Fielding's satire is that of a man of joyous and self-possessed temperament, who has come to definite conclusions as to what is to be expected in the world, while Smollett writes with pain and under irritation. Fielding has little scruple in hanging his villains, as if he had made up his mind that the proper treatment of villains was their physical annihilation; Smollett, with all his fiercer indignation, punishes his villains too, but generally deals with them in the end as if they might be curable. If Fielding's, on the whole, as Mr. Thackeray and most critics argue, is "the greater hand," there are peculiarities in Smollett in virtue of which Scott and others have hesitated to admit his absolute inferiority so easily as might be

expected, and have ranked him, all in all, as Fielding's rival. Some of Smollett's characters are as powerful creations as any in Fielding; and he has given us a range of sea characters in Tom Bowling, Trunnion, Hatchway, &c., to which there is nothing similar in the works of the other. In sheerly ludicrous episode, also—in the accumulation of absurd and grotesque detail till the power of laughter can endure no more—Smollett has perhaps surpassed Fielding. There is also a rhetorical strength of language in Smollett which Fielding rarely exhibits; a power of melodramatic effect to which Fielding does not pretend; and a greater constitutional tendency to the sombre and the terrible. There was potentially more of the poet in Smollett than in Fielding; and there are passages in his writings approaching nearer, both in feeling and in rhythm, to lyric beauty. Lastly, Smollett possesses one interesting peculiarity for readers north of the Tweed, in his Scotticism. Had he remained in Scotland, becoming an Edinburgh lawyer like his cousins, or settling in medical practice in Glasgow, the probability is that he would still have pursued authorship, and have left writings in his own peculiar vein, more Scottish in their substance than those that now bear his name, and so perhaps linking the

infancy of North-British literature in Allan Ramsay, with its maturity in Burns and Sir Walter. But though his fortunes carried him out of Scotland, the Scot was always strong in him. In his first novel, it is as a young Scot that he starts on the voyage of life; throughout his whole career he looks back with affection to the land of his birth, and even fights her political battles against what he considers to be English misconception and prejudice; and his last novel of all, written when he was a lingering invalid on the Italian coast, is the dying Scotchman's farewell to Scotland. Curiously enough, this last novel, though the most literally historical of all that he wrote, is, in its spirit and matter, the finest and mellowest, the most truly classical and poetical. Though *Roderick Random* and *Peregrine Pickle* should cease to be read, Scotchmen would still have an interest in preserving *Humphry Clinker*.

The humour of Sterne is not only very different from that of Fielding and Smollett, but is something unique in our literature. He also was a professed admirer of Cervantes; to as large an extent as Swift he adopted the whimsical and perpetually digressive manner of Rabelais; and there is proof that he was well acquainted with the works of preceding humorists less familiarly known in England.

But he was himself a humorist by nature — a British or Irish Yorick, with differences from any of those who might have borne that name before him after their imaginary Danish prototype; and, perpetually as he reminds us of Rabelais, his Shandean vein of wit and fancy is not for a moment to be regarded as a mere variety of Pantagruelism. There is scarcely anything more intellectually exquisite than the humour of Sterne. To very fastidious readers much of the humour of Fielding or of Smollett might come at last to seem but buffoonery; but Shakespeare himself, as one fancies, would have read Sterne with admiration and pleasure.

Tristram Shandy and the *Sentimental Journey* were certainly novelties in English prose writing. The first peculiarity that strikes us in them, considered as novels, is the thin style of the fiction in comparison either with that of Fielding or with that of Smollett. There is little or no continuous story. That special constituent of epic interest which arises from the fable or the action is altogether discarded, and is even turned into jest; and all is made to depend on what the critics called the characters, the sentiments, and the diction. As to the characters, who knows not that group of originals, Shandy the elder, Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim,

Dr. Slop, the Widow Wadman, &c.? These were "characters of nature," and not "characters of manners,"—creations of a fine fancy working in an ideal element, and not mere copies or caricatures of individualities actually observed. And how *good* they all are, what heart as well as oddity there is in them! One feels that one could have lived cheerfully and freely in the vicinity of Shandy Hall, whereas it is only now and then among the characters of Fielding and Smollett that this attraction is felt by the reader. Coleridge, who has noted as one of Sterne's great merits this faith in moral good as exhibited in his favourite characters, noted also his physiognomic skill and his art in bringing forward and giving significance to the most evanescent minutiæ in thought, feeling, look, and gesture. In the dissertations, digressions, and interspersed whimsicalities of Sterne we see the same art of minute observation displayed; while we are perpetually entertained and surprised by reminiscences from out-of-the-way authors (many of them plagiarisms from Burton), by remarks full of wit and sense, by subtleties of a metaphysical intellect, and by quaint flights of a gay and delicate, but bold imagination. The "tenderness" of Sterne, his power of "pathetic" writing, all his readers have confessed; nor

even can the artificiality of much of his pathos take away the effect on our sympathies. Sensibility—a capacity for being easily moved—was the quality he gave himself out as possessing personally in a high degree, and as most desirous of representing and diffusing by his writings, and he certainly succeeded. So far as sensibility can be taught by fiction, his works teach it, and perhaps it was one of his uses at the time when he lived that he had chosen to be the apostle of a quality which was otherwise greatly at a discount in contemporary literature. Add to all the exquisite accuracy and finish of Sterne's diction. Even now the grace, the insinuating delicacy, the light lucidity, the diamond-like sparkle of Sterne's style make reading him a peculiar literary pleasure. One could cull from his pages, and especially from his *Tristram Shandy*, a far greater number of passages for a book of elegant extracts than from the works of Fielding or Smollett. Several such passages are universal favourites already.

Mr. Thackeray, I am aware, has been very severe on Sterne, speaking far less of his genius as a writer than of his personal character, as seen in his life and his letters. I do not know that he is a whit more severe than the evidence warrants. Sterne's letters, and what is known of his life, do give a very

disagreeable impression of him, and are not calculated to enhance the value of the "sensibility" which he preaches. Nor is his portrait by Reynolds pleasant—fine eyes, but with a lowering expression, and the mouth sarcastic and sensual. We see him a slender hectic man, going about in his parish, or in London, or on the Continent, a prey to moping fits, cherishing all kinds of thrills and morbid nervous ecstasies, and indulging in tears as a habitual luxury; but out of his books we do not discern much of heart, or of real kindliness, much less of principle. It was Wordsworth, I believe, who objected to mixing up the biography of a writer with the criticism of his works. If there is any instance in which one could wish to agree with such a canon, it is certainly that of Sterne. Believing as I do, however, that we ought not to agree with Wordsworth in such a rule, and that the deepest literary criticism is that which connects a man's writings most profoundly and intimately with his personality, conceived comprehensively and with central accuracy, I can only hope that, if we had the means of investigating Sterne's character more largely and exactly, we should find the man, after all, as good as his genius. I believe, too, that Mr. Thackeray rates the genius of Sterne much too low,

and that, if the verdict of living readers of sufficient culture were taken, or if a list were made of eminent writers, even of a thoughtful and serious cast, who have admired him, Sterne's proper place among our British humourists would seem to be much higher than that which Mr. Thackeray has assigned to him. What is objectionable in his writings is well known, and cannot be palliated. That he was a clergyman makes the offence naturally greater. "Alas, poor Yorick!" Had he been a layman, like Fielding, more might have been pardoned to him, or there might have been less requiring pardon!

Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, carry us from the middle of the reign of George II. to the close of the first decad of that of his successor. During the first ten years of the reign of George III., and while Smollett and Sterne were still alive, the literature of British prose-fiction received additions from other pens. Three works of this date deserve special notice, as differing in kind from any mentioned heretofore, and also from each other:— Johnson's *Rasselas*, written in 1759; Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*, written in 1761, but not published till 1766; and Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, published in 1764, under the guise of a translation

from an old Italian romance. *Rasselas,* between which and Voltaire's "Candide," there is at once an analogy and a contrast, is less a novel or tale, than a series of Johnsonian reflections, strung on a thread of fictitious narrative. "Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy," it begins, "and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope, who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow, attend to the history of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia." And so on the story rolls, poetic and gloomy, like a bit of the Black Sea! There could not be a greater contrast between this work of the ponderous and noble Samuel, and the charming prose idyl of dear Irish Goldy. But, what need to speak of the *Vicar of Wakefield,* or of the genius of its author? The *Castle of Otranto* may more properly require a word or two. It was "an attempt," says the author, "to blend the two kinds of Romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former, all was imagination and improbability; in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success. Invention has not been wanting, but the great resources of fancy have been dammed up by a strict adherence to common life." By way of experiment, in reviving

the more imaginative style of romance, Walpole had bethought himself of a mediæval story of an Italian castle, the human tenants of which should act naturally, but should be surrounded by supernatural circumstances and agencies leading them on to their fate. I confess that on reperusing the story the other day, I did not find my nerves affected as they were when I read it first. The mysterious knockings and voices, the pictures starting from the wainscot, the subterranean vaults, and even the great helmet with the nodding black plumes in the courtyard, had lost their horror; and Walpole seemed to me a very poor master of the Gothic business, or of poetic business of any kind. The attempt, however, is interesting as a hark-back to mediævalism, at a time when mediævalism was but little in fashion. As a virtuoso Walpole had acquired a certain artificial taste for the Gothic; and his "Gothic Story," as he called it, did something to bring to the minds of British readers, on its first publication, the recollection that there had been a time in the world, when men lived in castles, believed in the devil, and did not take snuff, or wear powdered wigs.

To make the list of the British novelists complete down to the point which we have agreed in this lecture to consider as, in literary respects, the termi-

nation of the eighteenth century, I should have to go on and say something of the following writers:—Charles Johnstone, the author of the *Adventures of a Guinea* (1760), besides other now-forgotten novels; Henry Mackenzie of Edinburgh, whose *Man of Feeling*, *Man of the World*, and *Julia de Roubigné*, were published between 1770 and 1780; Miss Clara Reeve, the authoress of the *Old English Baron* (1777); Miss Fanny Burney, afterwards Madame D'Arblay, whose *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, the two best of her novels, appeared in 1778 and 1782 respectively; William Beckford, the author of the Oriental Romance of *Vathek* (1784); Richard Cumberland, better known as a dramatist, whose first venture as a novelist was his *Arundel* in 1789; Robert Bage, the Quaker, four of whose novels (now little read, but deemed worthy of republication by Scott in Ballantyne's Collection of British Novelists) appeared before 1789; and Dr. John Moore, of Glasgow (the father of Sir John Moore, and the friend and biographer of Smollett), whose novel of *Zeluco* was published in 1786. But though all of these were writers of talent, and though some of their novels might deserve separate recognition on account of peculiarities that might be detected in them, they may all be considered—so far, at least, as I am acquainted with

them—as having adopted the manner of some one or other of their recent predecessors. Johnstone is represented as a kind of composition of Smollett and Le Sage, with a more coarse and bitter spirit of satire than is found in either; Mackenzie has a general resemblance to Sterne; Miss Reeve's *Old English Baron* was a professed imitation of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto;* and so with the rest. It is not till about or a little after the year 1789, that we see a new order of novelists arising; of whom we are to take account in our next lecture. Meanwhile, let us bear in mind the fact that the British novel-writing of the eighteenth century had done much not only to enrich our prose-literature and to exercise our prose-faculty at home, but also to increase our reputation and our intellectual influence abroad. Till the times of Defoe and Richardson, we had been, in the article of Novels and Romances, if not in prose literature generally, an importing rather than an exporting nation; but our novelists of the eighteenth century turned the current the other way, and since then we have exported rather than imported. During Goethe's youth, all educated persons on the Continent were reading our Richardson, our Fielding, our Smollett, our Sterne, our Goldsmith.

LECTURE III.

SCOTT AND HIS INFLUENCE.

"Edina! Scotia's darling seat!
All hail thy palaces and towers,
Where once, beneath a monarch's feet,
Sat Legislation's sovereign powers!
From marking wildly-scattered flowers,
As on the banks of Ayr I strayed,
And singing lone the lingering hours,
I shelter in thy honoured shade!"

So sang Burns, with genuine enthusiasm, though not in his best literary strain, when first, a visitor from his native Ayrshire, he saluted the Scottish capital. At that time Edinburgh merited the salutation, even had it been expressed better. The Old Town was there as we still see it, or more perfect and untouched—the most romantic aggregate of natural height and hollow, and of quaint and massive building raised thereon by the hand of man, that existed within the circuit of Britain; the ridge of the High Street alone, from its crown in the old

craggy Castle down to its foot in Holyrood Palace and Abbey, forming a range of the antique and the picturesque in street-architecture such as no other British city could exhibit. And then the scenery surrounding! Calton Hill near and ready for its monuments; the Lion of Arthur's Seat grimly keeping guard; the wooded Corstorphines lying soft on one side; the larger Pentlands looming behind at a greater distance; down from the main ridge, and across the separating chasm, with its green and rocky slopes, the beginnings of a new city spilt out of the old; and, over these beginnings, the flats of the Forth, the Forth's own flashing waters, and, still beyond them, sea and land in fading variety to the far horizon—the shores of Fife distinctly visible, and, under a passing burst of sunlight, the purple peaks of the Highland hills! Sunlight or mist, summer or winter, night or day, where was there such another British city? Then fill this city with its historical associations. Let the memories of old Scottish centuries be lodged within it as they were when Burns first saw it, and the actual relics of these centuries in their yet undiminished abundance; let its streets, its alleys, nay its individual "lands" and houses be thought of as still retaining the legends and traditions, some grotesque and others

ghastly, of the defunct Scottish life that had passed through them, and left its scars on their very wood-work, and its blood-stains and wine-stains on their very stones! All this Burns was a man to remember, and to this he makes due allusion also in his ode:—

> "With awe-struck thought and pitying tears
> I view that noble stately dome,
> Where Scotia's kings of other years,
> Famed heroes, had their royal home!
> Alas! how changed the years to come!
> Their royal name low in the dust!
> Their hapless race wild-wandering roam;
> Though rigid law cries out 'twas just!'"

But he recognizes also other and more present claims in the Edinburgh of his day to his reverence, and to that of other Scotchmen:—

> "Here Justice from her native skies
> High wields her balance and her rod;
> There Learning with his eagle eyes
> Seeks Science in her coy abode."

Yes; among the 70,000 souls or thereby who then constituted the population of Edinburgh, there was a greater proportionate number of men of intellectual and literary eminence than in any other British community, not excepting London. A North-British Literature—so to be named as being distinct from that general British Literature which had London

for its centre, and which reckoned among its contributors those Scotchmen and Irishmen, as well as Englishmen, who chanced to have made London their home—had by this time come into existence and established itself. The date of the rise of this North-British Literature had been the reign of George II.; and Edinburgh had naturally become its centre, though Glasgow and Aberdeen assisted. At the time of Burns's visit, the Edinburgh stars belonging to this Literature were sufficiently numerous. Hume had been ten years dead, and some others had also disappeared; but Adam Smith and Monboddo and Blair and Robertson and Tytler and Henry and Hailes and Adam Ferguson, and the poets Home and Blacklock, and Henry Mackenzie and Harry Erskine, and the chemist Black, and Dugald Stewart, and others intermingled with these, formed together a very tolerable cluster of Northern Lights. Even as far as London their radiance could be seen, when Englishmen turned their eyes, which they rarely do, to the north; and, partly in compliment to them, partly with reference to the new local architecture, Edinburgh had begun to be called "The Modern Athens." The Ayrshire ploughman came into the midst of these men; received their praises and advices, and took the measure of them severally by

his own standard; and went back, little modified apparently by what he had seen, but full to his dying day of a Scotchman's respect for the capital of his native land.

What Burns then felt towards Edinburgh I believe that all educated Scotchmen, or all Scotchmen possessing anything of that *amor patriæ* with which Scotchmen generally are credited, felt also in varying degree. Not an Ayrshire Scot alone, but an Aberdeenshire Scot, or a Scot from the west coast, or a Scot from Caithness or the remote Orkneys, must have regarded Edinburgh as the seat of his country's most memorable traditions, the centre of her general life, the pride of her common heart. To make a pilgrimage thither was, in those days of difficult travel, a duty of love to the distant provincials who had conceived the city as yet but from book and from fancy; and to have actually seen Edina's towers and palaces was to retain the patriotic vision for ever, and to blend it with the local and nearer imagery of their special homes. Her very dust to them was dear.

Seventy years have elapsed since then; but is it, or needs it be, different now? No; a thousand times No! The Old City is there still, hacked by the pickaxe, and scathed by fires, and maltreated,

perhaps more than was necessary, by so-called improvements, but destined to resist the pickaxe, and fires, and improvements, till the picturesque ceases from the earth and the Castle has a Russian garrison. The Calton Hill has received its monuments; the Lion of Arthur's Seat still keeps guard; the Corstorphines are still softly wooded, and the Pentlands loom quiet where they did; to the south there is new beauty of building and of gardens over the fields; the great lamp-lit chasm under the ridge still separates the new from the old; and, when the cannon speaks from beside Mons Meg, and the flash flickers to the shores of Fife, the reverberation, ere it reaches the Forth, rattles the windows of a new city which has occupied the space since Burns saw it, and which, whatever may be its faults architecturally, forms, when looked down upon from the mouth of Meg, a sight the like of which *I* have never seen. We have not been doing *very* much of political or national history in Edinburgh these seventy years—there having been an end of that "auld sang" at the Union or at the Forty-five; still, even in this way, we have added something, civilly and ecclesiastically, to the old store of reminiscences. Parliament House still stands where it did; we can still study the physiognomies of Scotch judges on the bench,

if not of such originals as Kames or Esky; and I should like to know where in Britain there is such another peripatetic academy as that which marches up and down every day during term-time, wigged and gowned, in the great ante-room of your Law Courts. That sight is as good as a Parliament any day, and answers, I doubt not, a good many parliamentary purposes. But, after all, it is to the social and literary history of Edinburgh since Burns came to visit it—to the men who, since his time, have been and gone, and have mingled their minds with its activity, and left their works and their memories as a bequest to its keeping, and as a proof to all the world besides what men could live in Edinburgh and have their genius nursed amidst its circumstances, Parliament or no Parliament—it is to this that Edinburgh can point as the true addition to its educating influences, and to its associations of interest and delight, since the days of Burns. That North British Literature which had then begun its course and taken Edinburgh for its centre, has advanced, with no diminished productiveness, during the seventy intervening years. As before, Scotland has still spared, and perhaps in greater numbers than before, many of her sons for the service of general British Literature, as organized more especially, and by

commercial necessity, in London; but she has retained many of them to herself, has found the most proper footing for a goodly proportion of these in her own capital, and in what they have done there has had her pleasure and her reward. Among the men who have trod the streets of Edinburgh since Burns's days, and who, whether born within her precincts or only drawn thither from other parts of Scotland, have spent portions of their lives as her familiar citizens, what men there have been! Scott drew his first breath in Edinburgh; here he was living, a fair-haired youth of fifteen, when black Burns passed through; and here he grew up to be the man that the world was to hear of. Jeffrey also was born in Edinburgh, and here he lived and died. Chalmers came from Anster village, and Glasgow and St. Andrew's had him first; but Edinburgh had the honour of his old white head—which, oh, that never I can see again! Wilson, the magnificent, had his dwelling here; here he chanted his prose-poetry and shook, so savage, his yellow mane. Hither did northern Cromarty send her Scandinavian Hugh Miller; he explored your quarries and sea-beaches, and was a silent power among you till his big heart burst. Lastly, Hamilton is gone—the Scottish Stagirite, the metaphysician of recent Europe. Others

I could name, and others will occur to you; but these are a pre-eminent few.

Of the men I have mentioned no one was so thoroughly identified with Edinburgh as Scott. He, if any one, is the true *genius loci*. It is not without significance that in the very centre of the city there rises that monument to his memory which every eye in Edinburgh is compelled to rest on several times every day, whatever other object it misses. There his white statue sits, as it should, quite in the city's centre! Edinburgh is the city of Sir Walter Scott. There are, perhaps, those hearing me who remember him as he actually walked in these streets—who have watched his stalwart figure as it limped along on the footway before them, or, meeting him with a friend, have watched his bushy eyebrows and sagacious countenance, and overheard the burr of his voice. To me this is but a fancy; but even to me so much is the man identified with the place, that, as I pass the stationary statue, I seem to see the original as he was, and to follow him, and him alone, in the moving crowd on the other side of Princes Street. That was his walk on earth; and there, be sure, his spirit haunts, save when he revisits Abbotsford!

With Scott's birth in Edinburgh, and with his education and residence here, the fancy will con-

nect, and perhaps an actual study of the man's life would also in some degree connect, those two qualities of his genius to which it owed what was most characteristic in its action on the poetry, the prose fiction, and the general literature of Britain and of Europe—his veneration for the past, and his intense and yet catholic Scotticism. I am not here to venture on so extensive a task as an analysis of Scott's genius all in all, so as to see what he had in common with other men of the same literary order and in what he differed from them; but I think you will agree that, when I name these two qualities—his passion for the antique and his Scotticism—I name the two qualities which stood out so prominently in his character as to affect all the others and determine them in operation.

Veneration for the past, delight in the antique—this is pre-eminently the disposition of the Historian. The faculty of the Philosopher is Reason, the speculative faculty, which does not neglect the phenomena of the past, but works also in the present with a view to the future; the faculty of the Poet is Imagination, which need not expatiate in the past, except when it voluntarily chooses that particular field as footing for its ideal inventions; but the faculty of the Historian is Memory, whose very domain is the

past. True, there are historians of different types—some, as Herodotus, in whom the love of the past seems almost pure and motiveless, a kind of ultimate unreasoning feeling, happy in its own exercise; and others, as Thucydides, in whose narratives of past transactions there is more of the critical, or philosophical, or practical, or didactic spirit. True, also, it may be questioned whether—seeing that an exact and complete knowledge of the past, and especially of the distant past, is impossible, and it is always only the past as perceived and shaped by his own spirit, and as represented by his own present mode of thinking, that any historian can give us—that which is valuable and permanent in any history is not more the meaning than the materials; in other words, either the poetic significance with which the materials are invested by a mind seeing them in that haze which already generalises them for the imagination and blots out the particular, or the philosophic bearing on universal life which the mind can the more easily detect in them for a similar reason. Still, it remains true that the pure love of the past—the habit of incessantly remembering, instead of incessantly imagining or reasoning—is the characteristic of the historian as such; and that the differences among historians arise in part from the varying

strength of this characteristic, whether it is the poetical tendency or the philosophical tendency that goes along with it. In Scott the degree of this characteristic was enormous. He blended the poet with the historian, and the form of most of his works was poetical rather than professedly historical; but he frequently adopted the historical form, too; and there is scarcely a fragment of his poetry that has not history for its matter. There were other poets of his age, excelling him, some in one respect and some in another; but he beat them all in the article of history, and in all that the passion for history, and a head and heart full of history could give to a modern poet. In the sheer delight in the past, and the passion for gathering its reminiscences, he was as inordinately endowed as Herodotus; in whom, however, there was less of the poet in addition. Herodotus was a man, if we may so say, who walked round half the margin of the ancient Mediterranean, observing its monuments, collecting its legends, and painting its manners, so as to condense into one book all the wrecks of tradition and of fact which time had rolled down, in that the then colonised portion of the world, from the beginning of things to his own day. Scott was a man who, in virtue of a similar constitutional tendency

which he had educated from his boyhood, did the same for a limited portion of time over a limited portion of the much more extensively peopled and much more completely organised world of his day—Gothic Europe, from the tenth century or thereby onwards.

This limitation of Scott's love of the antique to a particular region geographically and a particular era chronologically, is worthy of notice. He does not go round and round the world (as who *could* in that fashion?); his themes are not even oriental, except when Gothic adventure, as in the crusades, takes him to the East. Gothic Europe is his range. Then, again, it is to the centuries that constitute the Gothic era of European history, and, preferably, to the last of these, after the rise of the feudal system out of the earlier mediæval chaos, that he confines his imaginative wanderings. He does not go back to classical times. It is as if, starting from the full light of his own days, and going back century after century—through the eighteenth to the seventeenth, and thence to the sixteenth, thence to the fifteenth, and so on—he had, in all, a range of about eight centuries through which he roamed, as in his proper domain, more attached to certain portions even of these than to others; and as if, the moment he had

penetrated far enough back to see the light of the anterior classical ages breaking through the gloom, then invariably he turned his steps, as feeling that, where there was Greek and Roman light, he had no interest in going, and he was at home only in the Gothic forest. With the exception of a back-reference now and then as far as the supposed days of King Arthur and of the British Druids, his oldest express theme, if I remember aright, is the wars of the Moors and the Goths in Spain. Scott's veneration for the past, then, was not a veneration for the whole past, but for the Gothic portion of it; and in this he differed from other men who have possessed in strong degree the same general affection for history. Niebuhr, for example, delighted in the classical past; there have been others whose tastes led them to Hellenic scenes and subjects rather than to Gothic and modern; and I do not believe that Scott felt half the enthusiasm for Cæsar that Shakespeare did. Those who have the affection for the past (and most poets have had it more or less) might, indeed, be subdivided farther, and in a somewhat interesting manner, according to the *portion* of the past which is observed most strongly to possess their affections. As Scott was preternaturally endowed with the affection as regards degree, so I believe that the

portion of the past on which *he* fastened was as extensive as so strong an affection could well apply itself to, and also that it was the most important for all modern purposes. Whether he did really understand the Gothic ages over which he roamed, whether his representations of feudal and mediæval facts, beliefs, costumes, and manners were really authentic and accurate, or whether and to what extent they were but fictitious makeshifts, which he partly knew to be such, is a question which may be reserved.

But Scott's veneration for the past reached its highest and most shrewd and intelligent form in his Scotticism. It is a coincidence with more than the usual amount of verbal good luck in it that his name should have been Scott—generically and comprehensively *the* Scotchman. In all Scotchmen, indeed, even the most philosophic and most cosmopolitan that the little land has produced, there has been found, it is believed, something of this Scotticism—this loving regard for the "land of brown heath and shaggy wood," and knowledge of its traditions, and sympathy, more or less hearty, with its habits, its prejudices, and its humours. Part of every Scotchman's outfit in life is, or used to be, his Scotticism, however much he might choose to disguise it or make

light of it. Nay, not a few of the most eminent literary Scotchmen before Sir Walter, had exhibited their Scotticism openly, ostentatiously, and with almost plaguy loudness, and had proclaimed it, through good report and through bad report, as a conscious element in their genius. So it was, as we have seen, with Smollett; and so, in still larger proportion, it had been with Burns:—

"Even then a wish, I mind its power—
A wish, that to my latest hour
Shall strongly heave my breast—
That I, for poor auld Scotland's sake,
Some usefu' plan or beuk could make,
Or sing a sang at least.
The rough bur-thistle, spreading wide
Amang the bearded bear,
I turned the weeder-clips aside,
And spared the symbol dear.
No nation, no station
My envy e'er could raise;
A Scot still, but blot still,
I knew nae higher praise!"

All this feeling Scott, too, had from his childhood; and in his earliest readings in his boyhood and youth he had nursed and fostered it—still turning and returning from his miscellaneous readings in the universal literature of European romance and history back with especial fondness to the legends and the history of his native land. Moreover, inasmuch as

he was a native of Edinburgh, it might be possible to show that his Scotticism was necessarily of a more central, and, as we may say, more metropolitan kind than the Scotticism of either Smollett or Burns. In his early familiarity with Edinburgh both physically and socially, and in his wanderings about its environs, he had acquired, in wonderfully strong degree, that affection for it, that actual magnetic or nervous connexion with it, which we have already described. Who does not remember the burst in "Marmion," when Edinburgh is seen from the Braids?

"Still on the spot Lord Marmion stay'd,
For fairer scene he ne'er surveyed.
When sated with the martial show
That peopled all the plain below,
The wandering eye could o'er it go,
And mark the distant city glow,
With gloomy splendour red;
For on the smoke-wreaths, huge and slow,
That round the sable turrets flow,
The morning beams were shed,
And tinged them with a lustre proud,
Like that which streaks a thunder-cloud.
Such dusky grandeur clothed the height
Where the huge castle holds its state,
And all the steep slope adown,
Whose ridgy back heaves to the sky,
Piled deep and massy, close and high,
Mine own romantic town."

But even in this outburst dedicated to his "own romantic town," his fancy passes instinctively to the whole land of which it is the capital. He makes Marmion and his companions glance beyond the city, far north to the Ochil mountains, to Fife and the Firth, to Preston-Bay and Berwick-Law; and then, in the next line, this limited scene stands as a representation of all Scotland :—

> "Fitz-Eustace' heart felt closely pent;
> As if to give his rapture vent,
> The spur he to his charger lent,
> And raised his bridle hand;
> And, making demivolte in air,
> Cried, 'Where's the coward that would not dare
> To fight for such a land?'"

As this general regard for all Scotland might be expected more particularly of a metropolitan Scot, so the poet had increased and cultivated it by his more than usual amount of travel and residence in those days in different parts of Scotland. Tweedside and the Border were soon familiar to him and dear to him as the region of his ancestors; he knew the West; he had gone far up the east coast, and ultimately he got as far as the Orkneys; and, at a time when the Highlands were much less pervious than they now are to Lowland tourists, he had lived in

them for months together, surrounded by tartan and Gaelic, and yet quite at home. It was not only with the scenery of his country that he was acquainted. Being himself one of the shrewdest, most kindly, and most sociable of men, and "having had from his infancy," as he says, "free and unrestrained com-"munication with all ranks of his countrymen, from "the Scottish peer to the Scottish ploughman," he knew their ways, their dialect, their modes of thought, their humours, as intimately as any Scotchman breathing. His profession as a lawyer, and his official position as a sheriff, added even a technical knowledge of Scottish institutions; and the age in which he lived was one in which it was possible for a retentive memory, like his, to store up reports and relics at first hand of a wilder state of Scottish society which had passed away—recollections, both Highland and Lowland, reaching back to the Jacobite Rebellions and even farther. All in all, his Scotticism was full, extensive, and thorough. In combination with his love of the past, it took, for the ordinary purposes of public citizenship, the form of Scottish Toryism; but in the larger field of literature its outcome was such as to thrill and please the world.

As all know, it was not till Scott's mature life, and

when he had already long been known as one of the first British poets and miscellaneous prose-writers of his time, that he turned into the track of prose fiction. From 1796 to 1805, or from his twenty-sixth to his thirty-fifth year, his literary occupations were in desultory translations from the German, and in collecting and editing Scottish ballads and romances; then, from his thirty-fifth year to his forty-fourth, came the period of his original metrical romances; and it was not till 1814, when the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" and "Marmion" and the "Lady of the Lake" had gone over the world in thousands, and people were detecting a falling off in the poems by which these had been succeeded, that he resolved to carry his love of the antique and his Scotticism out of that metrical style the power of which was waning, and made his first anonymous venture as a novelist in *Waverley*. Here, therefore, it is necessary that we should take a retrospective view of the course of British novel-writing from the point at which we left it in our last lecture, namely at or about the year 1789, on to this year 1814, when the author of *Waverley* burst on the novel-reading public like a meteor among the smaller stars. The interval is exactly a quarter of a century.

After Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Goldsmith, Walpole, and other writers belonging to the early part of the reign of George III., the respectability of the British novel was kept up, as we saw, though its resources were hardly extended, by such writers as Mackenzie, Miss Reeve, Miss Burney, Beckford, Cumberland, Robert Bage, and Dr. John Moore. Besides these respectable writers, there were scores of others engaged in producing trashy tales to supply the growing appetite for works of fiction which the older novelists had created. This was the age of the beginning of the so-called "Minerva-Press Novels," which continued to be poured forth in superabundance till Scott took the field. About the year 1789, however, we find, as might be expected, novelists of a better class making their appearance.

That year, as all know, is a great epoch in modern European history. It was the year of the French Revolution, when, through blood and war and universal agitation, the various countries of Europe passed out of that system of things which had subsisted during the eighteenth century, and entered on a new period of life—the period to which we now belong. For most purposes, the year 1789, and not the year 1800, is to be considered as the proper close

of the "Eighteenth Century." This is seen best in the history of literature. Take the history of British Literature for example. It is now an established practice among us to date the commencement of a new era in British literary history—the era in which we still are—from the year 1789, there or thereabouts. As a new social spirit then comes in—a spirit superseding the old Whiggism and Toryism of the eighteenth century, or, at least, giving a new significance to these terms by reconnecting them with first principles—so there then comes in also a new intellectual spirit. It is seen working in all the forms of our literature. Our philosophy begins to deepen itself, affected partly by the deeper social questions which the French Revolution had forced on the attention of mankind, partly by the quiet diffusion among us, through such interpreters as Coleridge, of ideas taken from the rising philosophy of Germany. Our historical literature also takes on a different hue, and begins to be characterised, on the one hand, by more of that spirit of political innovation and aspiration after progress which belonged to the revolutionary epoch, and on the other, by a kind of reactionary regard for that past which the revolution misrepresented and maligned. But, above all, the change was visible in our poetry.

In all our literary histories you will find the epoch of the French Revolution marked as the epoch of an interesting revival of natural British Poetry, after that interregnum of more artificial Poetry which had begun in Dryden. It is about this time that the simultaneous publications of Burns and Cowper, of Crabbe and Bowles, herald in the change of poetic style and matter which was consummated by Wordsworth. An attention rather to the permanent and invariable facts of life than to the changing aspects of human manners, a deeper reverence for nature, and a closer study of all natural appearances, a greater ideality of tone, and yet a return to truth and simplicity of diction—such, variously phrased, were the qualities on which, as Wordsworth alleged, the revival depended.

So far as the change was fundamental, it must have affected also our Prose Fiction. To some extent we find that it did so. I can here, however, be but brief in my indications.

In the interval between 1789 and 1814 I count twenty novelists of sufficient mark to be remembered individually in the history of British Prose Literature. Two of these are Robert Bage and Dr. John Moore, who had begun their career as novelists prior to 1789; the others, named as nearly as pos-

sible in the order of their appearance, are—Thomas Holcroft, Mrs. Charlotte Smith, Sophia and Harriet Lee, Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Radcliffe, Matthew Gregory Lewis, Mrs. Opie, William Godwin, Anna Maria Porter and Jane Porter, Miss Edgeworth, Miss Jane Austen, Mrs. Brunton, Mrs. Hamilton, Hannah More, Miss Owenson (afterwards Lady Morgan), and the Rev. Charles Maturin. I must depend very much on your own associations with these names for the impressions you are likely to take, along with me, as to the nature of the change or changes in British novel-writing which they represent as having occurred in the quarter of a century now under notice; but I may call your attention to one or two facts.

And, first, it is worth observing that no fewer than fourteen out of the twenty novelists that have been named were women. No fact of this kind is accidental; and an investigation concerning the causes of it might not be without results. Probably reasons for it might be found in the state of British society at that period, as affected by the general condition of Europe, and as leading to a somewhat new adjustment of the various kinds of intellectual occupation between the sexes—men let us say (and this is statistically the fact) transferring themselves

to other kinds of literature, including metrical Poetry, and retaining the ascendancy there; while women took possession of the Novel. Be the causes of the fact, however, what they may, the fact itself is interesting. If the Novel or Prose Fiction was the first fortress in the territory of literature which the women seized—nay, if they seized it all the the more easily because the men, being absent elsewhere, had left it weakly garrisoned—it cannot be denied, at all events, that they manned it well. Not only were the women in the majority, but they also did the duty of the garrison better than the men who had been left in it. With the exception of Godwin, I do not know that any of the male novelists I have mentioned could be put in comparison, in respect of genuine merit, with such novelists of the other sex as Mrs. Radcliffe, Miss Edgeworth, and Miss Austen. Out of this fact, taken along with the fact that from that time to this there has been an uninterrupted succession of lady-novelists, and also with the fact that, though the Novel was the first fortress into which the sex were admitted in any number, they have since found their way into other fortresses of the literary domain, not excepting Poetry, nor even History, and have done excellent duty there too—out of these

facts, I say, may we not derive a prognostication? May there not be still farther room in the realm of intellectual activity for the genius of women; may they not yet be in *all* the garrisons? For my part I know not a more unmanly outcry than that in fashion against "strong-minded women." Either the phrase is an irony which repetitiou has turned into a serious fallacy, and what is meant is, that the so called "strong-minded women" are *not* strong-minded, and that analogous specimens of men would be regarded as weak-minded; or the phrase is cruel and mean. No woman yet but was better, nobler, ay, and essentially more womanly in precise proportion as her natural abilities had received all the education of which they were capable! No man really but thinks so and finds it so—at least, no man worth his beard! As to what may be the inherent difference of intellectual and social function involved in the fact of sex, we need not trouble ourselves so very much. Whatever the difference is, nature will take ample care of it, and it will be all the better pronounced the less its manifestation is impeded. It is obvious that we have already gained much by the representation which women have been able to make of their peculiar dispositions and modes of perception in the portion of the field of litera-

ture which they have already occupied. Perhaps there was a special propriety in their selecting the Prose Fiction as the form of literature in which first to express themselves—the capabilities of that form of literature being such that we can conceive women conveying most easily through it those views and perceptions which, by presupposition, they were best qualified to contribute.

Another statistical fact connected with the list of novelists which I have given, is that, out of the entire twenty, *twelve* were of English, *six* of Irish, and only *two* of Scottish birth. This proportion suggests, with tolerable accuracy, certain easily-conceived differences as regards the themes chosen by the novelists, and their modes of treating them. To some extent, all of them took general British themes, or continental themes, or themes of general poetic interest; but we note also a certain affection in some of them for the representation of peculiarly national manners and circumstances; and, as might be expected, where this is the case, the affection follows the accident of birth. Thus Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Opie, and Miss Austen are novelists of English society and English manners; Miss Edgeworth, in not a few of her tales, constitutes herself, of express purpose, a painter and critic of Irish manners and Irish

society; and in Moore we have a characteristic dash of Scotticism. So far as there is an exception to what the statistical proportion just stated might suggest, it is in favour of Scotland. One or two of the English and Irish novelists took a fancy for Scottish subjects. The two Miss Porters, though of Irish birth, had resided long in Edinburgh; and from the younger of them Scottish boys have received that prime favourite of theirs, "The Scottish Chiefs" —a romance in which, as the boysfind out when they grow older, it is not exactly the historical Wallace or the Wallace of Blind Henry that is the hero, but a highly modernized Wallace, tremulous with the most exquisite sentiments, and carrying in his hand, as the saviour of Scotland, alternately a sword and a white cambric handkerchief. Mrs. Hamilton also, though born in Ireland, was of Scottish extraction, and was educated in Scotland; and her "Cottagers of Glenburnie" is a genuine Scottish story. And Mrs. Radcliffe's first romance was laid in Scottish feudal times.

Passing to the novels themselves, can we classify them into kinds? Can we discern in them any definite tendencies of the British novel-writing of the period different from those which existed before? As far as my recollected acquaintance with speci-

mens of the novels themselves entitles me to judge, I think that we can. The novels of the writers I have named may, I think, be grouped into three classes, each representing a *tendency* of the British prose-fiction of the period.

(1.) Perhaps the most characteristic tendency of British novel-writing, immediately or soon after the year 1789, was to the embodiment in fiction of those social speculations and aspirations which had sprung out of the French Revolution as observed from these islands. I need not tell you how powerfully all thoughtful minds in this country were then stirred by the tremendous events abroad—how, on the one hand, a veteran Burke was struck aghast and all but abjured his Whiggism, because it seemed as if a legion of fiends had come into alliance with it; and how, on the other, ardent young souls, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge and Southey, leaped with enthusiasm and saw the age of gold. Liberty, equality, fraternity; human progress and perfectibility; the iniquity of existing institutions—with these and such notions were many minds filled. They broke out in various forms—in poems and in works of prose-fiction, as well as in pamphlets and doctrinal treatises. In prose fiction Bage and Holcroft were representatives of the roused democratic spirit;

but its greatest representative by far was William Godwin. It was in 1794 that this remarkable man—already well known as a political writer, and destined to a long life of farther literary activity—published his novel entitled *Caleb Williams; or, Things as they are.* It was intended to be, as he said in his preface, "a study and delineation of things passing in the moral world," a poetical exposition of the vices and mal-arrangements of existing society, "a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism by which man becomes the destroyer of man." Those of you who remember the novel—the tale which it tells of the sufferings of the noble-minded and wealthy Falkland, who lives on with the consciousness of having committed a murder for which two innocent men have been hanged, and of the sufferings which, in self-preservation, he inflicts on the youth, Caleb Williams, his secretary, who has come into possession of the fatal secret—will judge of the truth of this description. In Godwin's later novels the spirit and purpose are the same, with variations in the circumstance. The action of society upon character, or, as one of his critics says, "Man the enemy of man"—such is his constant text.

> "Amid the woods the tiger knows his kind;
> The panther preys not on the panther brood;
> Man only is the common foe of man."

As Godwin's, however, was no vulgar intellect, and as his politics were of an ardent and speculative cast, so, even now, when his novels are read for their purely imaginative interest, they impress powerfully.

(2.) As distinct from the kind of novel which Godwin represented, we have, in the list under view, various specimens of what may be called the Gothic romance of the picturesque and the terrible. The beginnings of this kind of novel have been referred to Walpole, in his *Castle of Otranto,* and to his imitator, Miss Reeve, in her *Old English Baron;* but it attained its full development in the present period, in the fictions of Mrs. Radcliffe, Matthew Gregory Lewis, and, I believe, also in those of Maturin, and in some of those of the Miss Porters and of Harriet Lee. In so far as the tendency to this kind of fiction involved a romantic veneration for the past, it may be regarded as a reaction against the revolutionary spirit of the time, as embodied in Godwin and others. But it would be too superficial a view of the nature of the tendency to suppose that it originated merely in any such reaction, conscious or unconscious. Godwin himself goes back, in some of his novels, to feudal times, and is not destitute of power of imagination in old Gothic circumstance. We see, indeed, that the great literary controversy

between Classicism and Romanticism was a direct result of the French Revolution. In that crisis the Gothic depths of the western European mind were broken into; and though, politically, the immediate effect was a disgust of the past and a longing towards the future as the era of human emancipation, yet, intellectually, the effect was a contempt for classic modes of fancy and composition, and a letting loose of the imagination upon Nature in her wildest and grandest recesses, and upon whatever in human history could supply aught in affinity with the furious workings of contemporary passion. The Gothic Romance of the picturesque and the ghastly afforded the necessary conditions. Gloomy Gothic castles in wild valleys, with forests clothing the neighbouring hills; lawless banditti hovering round; the moon bowling fearfully through clouds over inland scenes of horror, or illuminating with its full blue light Italian bays and fated spots on their promontories; monks, tyrannical chieftains, and inquisitors; shrieks in the night, supernatural noises, the tolling of the bell, the heavy footstep in the corridor;—"Hark! it approaches; save me, save me;"—at that instant, the flash of lightning through the Gothic window; the door dashed open; the unnameable apparition; the roar of the simultaneous thunder; "Ye powers

of Hell!"—No, Heaven has its messengers too; the voice cries, "Forbear;" she's saved, she's saved! Of all the practitioners of this style of art, need I say that Mrs. Radcliffe is the chief? She has been called the Salvator Rosa of British prose fiction; and, in reference to her *Sicilian Romance*, her *Romance of the Forest*, her *Mysteries of Udolpho*, and her *Italian*, Sir Walter Scott has but done her justice when he says: "Fielding, Richardson, Smollett, and "even Walpole, though writing upon imaginative "subjects, are decidedly prose authors; but Mrs. "Radcliffe has a title to be considered the first "*poetess* of romantic fiction—that is, if actual "rhythm shall not be deemed essential to poetry." Mrs. Radcliffe's romances are, indeed, of a wholly fantastic kind of Gothic, with no whit of foundation in actual knowledge of mediæval history. Her characters are but vague melodramatic phantoms that flit through her descriptions of scenery, and serve as agents for her terrific situations. There is something like treachery also to the true theory of her style in her habit of always solving the mystery at the end by purely natural explanations. Monk Lewis and others of the school were more daring in this respect.

(3.) The majority of the novelists of our list, how-

ever, were, as their predecessors of the eighteenth century had been, mere painters of life and manners, with more or less of humour and more or less of ethical purpose. Moore, the two Miss Lees, Mrs. Inchbald, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Opie, Miss Edgeworth, Mrs. Brunton, Mrs. Hamilton, Hannah More, Miss Owenson—all of them lady-novelists, except one—continued this style of fiction. The differences in their novels, as compared with previous novels of life and manners, must be considered as arising, in part, from the actual differences of the life and manners that were to be painted, but in part, also, from a difference in the method of description—which last may be resolved into the fact, already noted, that women were now taking their turn as describers, and bringing their peculiar tact of perception, and their peculiar notions of the right and the tasteful, to the task of representing much in society that had been omitted before, and especially the ways of their own sex. Among these lady-novelists, Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austen were, undoubtedly, the first in talent. So far as they remind us of previous novelists of the other sex, it is most, as might be expected, of Richardson; but, while resembling him in minuteness of observation, in good sense, and in clear moral aim, they present many differences.

All in all, as far as my information goes, the best judges unanimously prefer Miss Austen to any of her contemporaries of the same order. They reckon her *Sense and Sensibility*, her *Pride and Prejudice*, her *Mansfield Park* and her *Emma* (which novels were published in her life-time), and also her *Northanger Abbey* and her *Persuasion* (which were published posthumously) as not only better than anything else of the kind written in her day, but also among the most perfect and charming fictions in the language. I have known the most hard-headed men in ecstasies with them; and the only objection I have heard of as brought against them by ladies is, that they reveal too many of their secrets.

We return to Scott. In virtue both of his constitution and of his education, Scott, if he had betaken himself to prose fiction at first, instead of deferring his exercises in it to his mature age, would have had his connexions, in the main, with the two last-named schools of British novel-writing at the close of the last and the beginning of the present century. He would have stood apart from Godwin and his class of political and speculative novelists, or would have even proclaimed himself their antagonist; and he would have taken rank both among the romance-

writers of the Gothic picturesque and among the painters of contemporary life and manners—a chief among both by reason of the general superiority of his genius, and producing among both those peculiar effects which would have resulted from his passion for the real in History, from his extensive antiquarian knowledge, and from his Scotticism. We have his own authority for this statement. He tell us that, as early as 1799 or 1800, before he had appeared conspicuously as a poet, he had meditated the composition of a prose tale of chivalry, after the example of Walpole's "Castle of Otranto," but on a Scottish subject, and with "plenty of Border characters and supernatural incident." He had actually written some pages of such a romance, to be entitled "Thomas the Rhymer," when circumstances changed his intention. He did not, however, abandon the idea of a Scottish prose romance; in 1805 he wrote a portion of *Waverley;* and, though that, too, was thrown aside, the impression made upon him by Miss Edgeworth's Irish tales was such as to convince him that, when he had leisure, he should be able to do something in a similar style, for the representation of Scottish manners. The leisure came in 1814, when *Waverley* was completed and published. Between that date and his death in 1832 he gave to the world,

besides much else, the rest of the series of the Waverley Novels.

If we omit one or two tales now included in the series, but not originally published in it, the Waverley Novels are twenty-nine in number. Of these twenty-nine novels, unless I err in my recollection of their contents, 12 belong to the eighteenth century, whether to the earlier or to the later part of it—namely, *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary*, *Rob Roy*, *The Black Dwarf*, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *St. Ronan's Well*, *Redgauntlet*, *The Highland Widow*, *The Two Drovers*, and *The Surgeon's Daughter*; 6 belong to the seventeenth century—namely, *Old Mortality*, *The Legend of Montrose*, *The Pirate*, *Woodstock*, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, and *Peveril of the Peak*; 3 to the sixteenth—namely, *The Monastery*, *The Abbot*, and *Kenilworth*; 3 to the fifteenth—namely, *Quentin Durward*, *The Fair Maid of Perth*, and *Anne of Geierstein*; 1 to the fourteenth—namely, *Castle Dangerous*; and the remaining 4 to other centuries as far back as the end of the eleventh—namely, *Ivanhoe*, *The Betrothed*, *The Talisman*, and *Count Robert of Paris*. Thus it appears that, though Scott did not hesitate to throw an occasional novel pretty far back into feudal and Gothic times, he preferred,

on the whole, ground nearer to his own age, where he could blend the interest of romantic adventure with that of homely and humorous representation of manners. Take another numerical classification of the novels on a different principle. Out of the whole twenty-nine, no fewer than 19, as I calculate, have their scenes laid wholly, or in great part, in Scotland, and are almost throughout novels of Scottish circumstance; 5 have their scenes laid in England—one of which, however, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, has much of Scottish circumstance in it; 2 have their scenes on the Continent—one of which, however, *Quentin Durward*, has a Scotchman for its hero; and 3 are Oriental in their ground and reference—of which one also, *The Talisman*, is dedicated to the adventures of a Scotchman. Thus, as regards place, it appears that Scott kept by preference near home, and that, but for some six or seven novels spared for purely English or for more remote themes, the name of "The Scottish Novels" might be applied with accuracy to the entire series. Combining the two classifications, and taking note of the order in which the novels were published, we can farther see, very distinctly, that Scott began with those which were Scottish in their subjects and lay nearest his own age, and that, only after he had pretty well

exhausted that ground and that time, did he work far backwards chronologically and away from Scotland geographically. *Ivanhoe,* which was his first novel not Scottish in subject, and also the first thrown farther back in time than the seventeenth century, was the tenth novel of the series in the order of composition.

You do not expect me, I am sure, to criticise the Waverley novels. We all know them and we all enjoy them. There has been a deluge of British novels since they were written—many of them most rich and striking, and some of them presenting subtle characteristics which we do not seek in the Waverley novels, and which recommend them in an express manner to recent tastes; but when we are fatigued after a hard day's work and want a book in the evening, do we not, all of us, find it answer our purpose to fall back on a Waverley novel? At such times do we not run over the series mentally or on the bookshelf to see which of the novels it is that lies farthest off in our recollection; and, even should that chance to be the poorest of the set, do we not find it, after all, very pleasant reading? And, in this way, do we not systematically recover one after another of the series, just as it is slipping over the horizon of our memory, and retain all in permanent

possession? And, when we think how many can use the books in this way—that it is not the rich or the learned only that can thus wile away an hour of fatigue over these volumes, but that to myriads of the poor and laborious wherever our language is spoken, and, through translation, farther still, they serve the same refreshing function, as being so simple in matter and of such general interest, that the unlearned as well as the learned can understand them, and, at the same time, so pure and healthy in the main that no mind can take harm from them—have we not, in this thought, some measure of the gratitude which, if only on the score of innocent amusement, the world owes to Scott? He was a modest, hearty man, with as little of the cant of authorship about him as any author that ever lived; he even detested that cant, talked as little of books as any man, and was a living rebuke to that miserable pedantry of our book-making days which thinks and acts as if books were the only things of interest in the world, as if the earth were mere standing ground for writers and printers, the sea ink, and the sky parchment; and hence, when he spoke of his own novels, or of prose fiction in general, it was enough for him to think that the means of innocent amusement were thereby increased, and that men, in the midst of their

business, might thereby have their minds a little lightened, and their hearts stirred by cheerful fancies. In attaining this, he attained more than he cared to mention as involved in it. It is the part of all poets and creative writers thus to make rich the thought of the world by additions to its stock of well known fancies; and when we think of the quantity of Scott's creative writing as well as of its popularity in kind—of the number of romantic stories he gave to the world and the plenitude of vivid incident in each, of the abundance in his novels of picturesque scenes and descriptions of nature, fit for the painter's art and actually employing it, and, above all, of the immense multitude of characters, real and fantastic, heroic and humorous, which his novels have added to that ideal population of beings bequeathed to the world by the poetic genius of the past, and hovering round us and overhead as airy agents and companions of existence—he evidently takes his place as, since Shakespeare, the man whose contribution of material to the hereditary British imagination has been the largest and the most various. Strike out Scott, and all that has been accumulated on him by way of interest on his capital, from the British mind of the last seventy years, and how much poorer we should be! His influence is more widely diffused

through certain departments of European and American literature than that of any individual writer that has recently lived; and, many generations hence, the tinge of that influence will still be visible.

It was no slight thing for the interests of British prose fiction, in relation to other established forms of our literature, that such a man as Scott, already laurelled as a metrical poet, and possessing besides a general reputation in the world of letters, should have devoted the last eighteen years of his life to activity in that particular field. Prose Fiction assumed, in consequence, a higher relative dignity; nay Prose itself could be conscious of having advanced its standard several stages nearer to the very citadel of Poesy. Apart, however, from the extension given by the Waverley novels to the prose form of fiction in the general realm of imaginative writing, we note several other influences which they had on the direction and aims of imaginative writing, whether in prose or in verse. For an exposition of one of these influences—the influence exerted by Scott's peculiar method of viewing and describing natural scenery upon our modern art of landscape, whether in literature or in painting—I may refer you to Mr. Ruskin, to whose observations on such a subject it is not for me to add anything. You will find in the

third volume of Mr. Ruskin's "Modern Painters" ample illustrations of Scott's fine sense of the picturesque in natural scenery, and especially of that by which Mr. Ruskin sets so much store, his fondness for colour and sensitiveness to its effects; and you will there also find distinctions acutely expounded between Scott's mode of viewing nature and Wordsworth's mode, and also between Scott's mode and that of Tennyson and other more recent poets. It remains for me, in concluding this lecture, to call your attention again to those two characteristics of Scott which we agreed to consider as the most prominently marked in his genius—his veneration for the past, or the tendency of his genius to the historical; and, as a special form of that, his Scotticism. Out of these characteristics, as might be expected, spring two of the most notable influences which he has exerted on British prose fiction.

And, first, by the historical character of his novels, he communicated a historical tendency to our literature of fiction, which has not yet exhausted itself, and which has led to important results not ending in fiction only. Scott is the father of the Modern Historical Novel. There had been attempts at the thing before; but he first established this form of writing among us. In virtue, however, of his own

affection not so much for the whole of the historical past as for the Gothic portion of that past, from the tenth or eleventh century downwards,—that is for the ages of European chivalry and feudalism, and the times succeeding them,—he established the Historical Novel among us, so far as his own labours went, not in its entire capabilities, but only as applied to the range of the Gothic period, mediæval and modern. Scott is said to be the founder of the Novel of Chivalry. Such a designation, however, though accurate so far, is not sufficiently extensive. By far the greater number of his novels, as we have seen, are not novels of the age of Chivalry, nor even of that of Feudalism, but refer to times subsequent to the Reformation, and, most of them, to the latter half of the seventeenth or to the eighteenth century. The phrase "Historical Novel" is, therefore, the more suitable; or, to be more precise still, "the Historical Novel of the Gothic period in Europe." Those who have in their minds the proper signification of the words "Gothic period," as meaning the period of the leading activity of the so-called Gothic race in civilization, will understand what is here meant. There is no doubt that Scott did much to rouse an interest in this period of history, to settle our filial affections upon it as that whence we derive imme-

diately all that is in us and about us; and also that he did much to interpret it to us, to make its habits, its costumes, its modes of life and action, more conceivable and intelligible. Even in such a matter as the revival among us of a taste for Gothic architecture and for mediæval art generally, Scott's influence may be traced.

Here, however, comes in a question which was reserved. Was Scott's wholesome influence in the matter of Gothicism and mediævalism direct or indirect? Did he do the good he has done in this department by his own actual teachings, or only by setting a fashion which has led or may lead to more earnest inquiries and to more accurate teachings? Did Scott really understand the earlier feudal and chivalrous times which he represents in some of his novels? Were his notions of those times authentic and true, or only fictitious makeshifts? Mr. Ruskin, with all his admiration for Scott, pronounces decidedly against him in this question. He says that Scott, though he "had some confused love of Gothic architecture, because it was dark, picturesque, old, and like nature," knew nothing really about it, and was wrong in all he thought he knew. He says further, that Scott's "romance and antiquarianism, his knighthood and monkery," are all false and were

known by himself to be false. Baron Bunsen gives a similar opinion; and, indeed, I know that the opinion is general among men whose judgment in such a matter is entitled to respect. I have heard a very good judge say that the German novel, "Sidonia the Sorcerer," is a deeper and truer delineation of mediæval life than any of Scott's. For my own part, I cannot quite agree with this depreciation of Scott's mediævalism and feudalism, or, at least, with the manner of it. I do not think that it was his antiquarian information that was in fault; at least, in reading his *Ivanhoe*, or his *Talisman*, or his *Quentin Durward*, or his *Fair Maid of Perth*—in all of which he certainly flashes on the fancy in a manner that historians had not done before, and, with all their carping, have not found out the art of doing yet, a vivid condition of things intended to pass for mediævalism and feudalism—I cannot find that our severest men of research have yet furnished us with that irrefragable and self-evidencing scheme or theory of Mediævalism and Feudalism, by the test of which what Scott proffers as such is to fall so obviously into rubbish. Men, in hovering over a time, must fancy somewhat about it; and a very vivid "somewhat" will stand till accurate knowledge furnishes the imagination with the substitute. Scott's "some-

what" about Chivalry and Feudalism, besides that it will fade fast enough as we get a better, was not picked up at random, or without an amount of acquaintance with the materials that was in his time rather uncommon.

What in Scott's Gothicism and Mediævalism *is* false arises, I believe, from a certain defect in his genius, which would have produced, and perhaps did produce, corresponding falsity in his imaginations out of the Gothic and mediæval regions altogether—to wit, his deficiency in the purely speculative faculty. The only Scottish thing that Scott had not in him was Scotch metaphysics. His mind was not of the investigating, or philosophic, or speculative type; he was not, in the distinctive sense of the term, a thinker. Craniologists see this defect, they tell us, in the very shape of his head—high above the ears, but not long from back to front. Whether the defect was in his head or in his thumbs, there it was, and it produced its consequences. It is in this most conspicuously that he falls short of Shakespeare. It is owing to this that, in so many of his more stately and ambitious characters—as when he tries to paint a Cromwell or a Raleigh, or a Queen Elizabeth, or a Louis the Eleventh, or an enthusiastic mediæval monk—it seems as if he could but give a certain exte-

rior account of the physiognomy, costume, and gesture, but had no power to work from the inner mind outwards, so as to make the characters live. He cannot get at the mode of thinking of such personages; indeed the notion of a "mode of thinking" as belonging to persons, or to ages, and to be seized in representing them, was not very familiar to him. If he did not reproduce the earnest and powerful thought of the mediæval period, its real feelings and beliefs, it was because his philosophy of the human mind and of human history was not so deep and subtle as to make feelings, beliefs, and modes of thought, the objects of his anxious imagination. But, if he failed in representing a great and peculiar mind of the historical past, he would equally have failed, and for the same reason, in representing a great and peculiar mind of the historical present. This is a feat, indeed, to which I do not think we can boast that many of our writers of prose fiction have been, at any time, competent.

The wonder is that Scott, notwithstanding his defect, succeeded so marvellously where he did succeed. Need I say where that is? Do we not feel that in his representations of homely and even of striking and heroic Scottish characters (with the exception already implied, and accounted for, of his Presby-

terians and Covenanters), in a period of Scottish society near to his own time—in his representations of Scottish life and Scottish humours, nay of Scottish beliefs and modes of thinking in the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries (repeat the exception, at least partially) or even farther back still, where his shrewd observations of present human nature could co-operate with his antiquarian knowledge in filling out a social picture—he was simply as successful as it was possible to be? Are not his Davie Gellatlys, his Dandie Dinmonts, his Counsellor Pleydells, his Oldbucks, his Saunders Mucklebackets, his Edie Ochiltrees, his Cuddie Headriggs, his Nicol Jarvies, his Caleb Balderstones, his Dugald Dalgettys, his Meg Doddses, and the like—nay, in a more tragic and elevated order, are not his Meg Merrilieses, his Rob Roys, his Redgauntlets, his Jeannie Deanses—as perfect creations as any in literature? These, and especially the homelier characters, are simply as well done as they could possibly be; and, in their conception and execution, I do not know that Scott *is* inferior to Shakespeare. Is it that in such cases his Scottish heart and his poetic instinct, acting on what he saw and knew, whirled him beyond his conscious power of speculation; or is it that, after all, there was a speculative faculty in Scott which he had not worked?

From the shrewdness and sagacity of some of his critical prefaces to his novels, where he discusses principles of literature without seeming to call them such, I am sometimes tempted to believe the latter.

And so, after all, Scott is greatest in his Scotticism. It is as a painter of Scottish nature and Scottish life, an interpreter of Scottish beliefs and Scottish feelings, a narrator of Scottish history, that he attains to the height of his genius. He has Scotticized European literature. He has interested the world in the little land. It had been heard of before; it had given the world some reason to be interested in it before; with, at no time, more than a million and a half of souls in it, it had spoken and acted with some emphasis in relation to the bigger nations around it. But, since Scott, the Thistle, till then a wayside weed, has had a great promotion in universal botany, and blooms, less prickly than of yore, but the identical Thistle still, in all the gardens of the world. All round the globe the little land is famous; tourists flock to it to admire its scenery, while they shoot its game; and afar off, when the kilted regiments do British work, and the pibroch shrills them to the work they do, and men, marking what they do, ask whence they come, the answer is "From the land of Scott."

" O Caledonia, stern and wild,
Meet nurse for a poetic child !"

sang Scott long ago. Caledonia nursed *him*, and he has repaid the nursing. And this man was born amongst *you !* This city gave him birth. All Scotland claims him, but *here* he had his peculiar home. Nor was he *ultimus Scotorum*, nor the last of the men of Edinburgh. You have since had among you, born among you or naturalized among you from other parts of Scotland, other specimens of the national breed—Jeffrey, Chalmers, Wilson, Miller, Hamilton. Nature abhors duplicates; and though in all of these there was an element of characteristic Scotticism, and this was a source of their strength, all of them were men by themselves, powerful by reason of their independent mould and structure, and not one of them a repetition of Scott. This is as it should be. Scotticism is not one invariable thing, fixed and intransmutable. It does not consist merely in vaunting and proclaiming itself, in working in Scottish facts, Scottish traditions, Scottish reminiscences—all of which has perhaps been done enough; it may be driven inwards; it may exist internally as a mode of thought; and there may be efficient Scotticism where not one word is said of the Thistle, and where the language

and the activity are catholic and cosmopolitan. And, seeing that it is so, need we suppose that we have yet seen the last of the Scotchmen, the last of the men of Edinburgh? No! The drain may still be southwards; Scotland now subserves, politically at least, the higher unity of Great Britain, just as that unity in its turn subserves a larger unity still, not so obviously carved out in the body of the surrounding world; at the time when Scotland was united to her great neighbour, she was made partaker of an intellectual accumulation and an inheritance of institutions, far richer, measured by the mode of extension, than she had to offer to that neighbour in return; and since that period, while much of the effort of Scotland has been in continuation of her own separate development, much has necessarily and justly been ruled by the law of her fortunate partnership. And so for the future, it may be the internal Scotticism, working on British or on still more general objects, and not the Scotticism that works only on Scottish objects of thought, that may be in demand in literature as well as in other walks. But while Scotland is true to herself, and while nature in her and her social conditions co-operate to impart to her sons such an education as heretofore, there needs be no end to her race of

characteristic men, nor even to her home-grown and home-supported literature. And, if so of Scotland at large, so relatively of the city that is her centre. While the traditions of Edinburgh are not forgotten, nor her monuments destroyed, nor her beauties eradicated; while the Castle still frowns in the midst, and the Lion of Arthur's Seat still keeps guard, and the wooded Corstorphines lie soft on one side, and the Pentlands loom larger behind, and the same circle of objects surrounds the ravished sight by day, and at night the lamp-lit darkness of the city's own heights and hollows is one glittering picturesque, and far off Inchkeith light flashes and disappears, piercing this nocturnal picturesque intermittingly, as with the gleam of a distant mystery; so long, if but human will and industry answer as they ought, may this city keep up her intellectual succession. There are great ones gone, and nature abhors duplicates; but

> "Other spirits there are, standing apart
> Upon the forehead of this *town* to come."

LECTURE IV.

BRITISH NOVELISTS SINCE SCOTT.

THE British Novelists since Scott are a very numerous body. Among them may be reckoned some of those mentioned in my last Lecture as having *preceded* Scott in the field of Prose Fiction—particularly Mrs. Opie, Godwin, the two Miss Porters, Miss Edgeworth, Lady Morgan, and Mr. Maturin. Though these had all preceded Scott as writers of prose fiction, they continued to write novels after the Author of Waverley had become the acknowledged king of that species of literature; and some of them were not less affected than their juniors by his surpassing influence. Then, in the list of British novelists who made their appearance during the eighteen years in which the Waverley novels were in progress, some very shortly after the series had been begun, and others just as it was closing and Scott was retiring from the scene, I count no fewer than thirty-five names of some past or present note—to wit, in Scotland, or of

Scottish birth, and under the immediate shadow of the Author of Waverley, John Galt, Mrs. Johnstone, Miss Ferrier, the Ettrick Shepherd, Allan Cunningham, Scott's son-in-law Lockhart, Professor Wilson, Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, Andrew Picken, and David M. Moir; in Ireland, or of Irish birth, Mr. Thomas Colley Grattan, Banim, Crofton Croker, Gerald Griffin, and William Carleton; and in England, and chiefly of English birth, Godwin's daughter Mrs. Shelley, Lady Caroline Lamb, Mr. Peacock, Thomas Hope, Leigh Hunt, Theodore Hook and his brother Dr. James Hook, James Morier, Mr. Lister, Mr. Plumer Ward, Mr. Gleig, Mr. Horace Smith, Miss Mitford, Miss Landon, Mr. Disraeli, Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, Mrs. Gore, Captain Marryat, Mr. James, and Mrs. Trollope. The majority of these, it will be observed, survived Scott; and not a few of them, though they had taken their places as novel-writers while Scott was alive, attained their full celebrity in that capacity after Scott was gone. In the group of some ten or twelve active novel writers upon whom the future hopes of the British novel were supposed to rest in 1832, the year of Scott's death, were Theodore Hook, Miss Mitford, Mr. Disraeli, Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, Mrs. Gore, Mr. James, and Mrs. Trollope. Several of these are still with us, and

have certainly done more for the novel, in the matter of quantity at least, than could have been expected from them,—Sir Bulwer Lytton having produced in all some five-and-twenty novels; Mrs. Gore and Mrs. Trollope I know not how many; Mr. James I know not how many; and Mr. Disraeli having escaped similar productiveness only by that series of events which diverted his attention to politics, and has made him a British minister. To this group of novelists left in the field at Scott's death there have been added, in the course of the quarter of a century which has elapsed since then, a little legion of new recruits. I will not venture on a complete list of their names; but when I mention those of Lady Blessington, Miss Martineau, Mrs. S. C. Hall, Mr. Harrison Ainsworth, Mr. Leitch Ritchie, the Howitts, Mr. Folkestone Williams, Charles Dickens, Mr. Lever, Mr. Samuel Warren, Douglas Jerrold, Elliot Warburton, Mr. James Grant, Mrs. Crowe, Miss Jewsbury, William Makepeace Thackeray, Mr. Lewes, Mr. Shirley Brooks, Mr. Whyte Melville, Mr. Wilkie Collins, the brothers Mayhew, Mr. Charles Reade, Mr. James Hannay, Mr. Whitty, Mr. Anthony Trollope, Mrs. Marsh, Mrs. Oliphant, Miss Kavanagh, Miss Mulock, Miss Sewell, Miss Yonge, Miss Craik, Miss Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell,

Charles Kingsley, and the author of *Tom Brown*, they will suffice to suggest the others. All in all, were we to include in the catalogue of "British Novelists since Scott," all who have written novels with some degree of popular success from the date of the first Waverley Novels to the present time, the catalogue, I believe, would include over a hundred names.[1] You will understand that I do not suppose included in this catalogue the contemporary American writers of prose fiction. These also have been numerous, and there have been among them, as you know, writers whose works have interested as powerfully on this side of the Atlantic as on the other; but, except by implication, I do not take them into account.

If a list of the British novelists since Scott seems formidable, how much more formidable would be the sight of the novels produced by them gathered into one heap! On this point allow me to present you with some statistics. The British Museum authorities cannot be sure that they receive copies of all the novels published in the British Islands; but it is

[1] The names cited by me are those of the writers with whose works my own acquaintance, direct or indirect, chances to be greatest; but, in the list prefixed to the second volume of Mr. Jeaffreson's *Novels and Novelists* (1858), I count thirty-five additional names, and every season is adding fresh ones.

likely that their collection is more complete, for the period with which we are now concerned, than any other that exists. Now, I have been informed that the number of novels standing on the shelves of the British Museum Library as having been published in Britain in the year 1820—*i. e.* when the Waverley Novels were at the height of their popularity—is 26 in all, counting 76 volumes; that, ten years later, or in 1830, when the Waverley series was nearly finished, the yield to the Library in this department had increased to 101 books, or 205 volumes within the year; that, twenty years later, or in 1850, the yield was 98 books or 210 volumes; and that for the year 1856, the yield was 88 books or 201 volumes. Taking these data as approximately accurate, they give us the curious fact that the annual yield of British novels had been quadrupled by the time of Scott's death as compared with what it had been when he was in the middle of his Waverley series—having risen from 26 a-year, or a new novel every fortnight, to about 100 a-year, or nearly two new novels every week; and, moreover, that this proportion of about 100 new novels every year, or two every week, has continued pretty steady since Scott's death, or, if there has been any change, has fallen off lately rather than increased. Making an average calculation from

these facts, I find that there may have been in all about 3,000 novels, counting about 7,000 separate volumes, produced in these islands since the publication of "Waverley." And this corresponds pretty well with a calculation made on independent grounds. In the London Book Catalogue, giving a classified Index of all books published in Great Britain from the year 1816 to the year 1851 inclusive, the novels or works of prose fiction occupy twenty-two pages, and amount to about 3,300 separate entries. In this list, however, reprints of old novels as well as translations and reprints of imported novels are included. Balancing these against the probable yield of the six years, from 1852 to 1857 inclusive, not embraced in the Catalogue, I believe that my calculation, as just stated, may pass as near the truth.

Now, you don't expect me to have read, during my pilgrimage, these 7,000 volumes of British novels. The thing is practicable. It is satisfactory to think that, by sticking to two novels a-week, any one who chooses may, at the present rate, keep up with the velocity of the novel-producing apparatus at work among us, and not have a single novel of deficit when he balances at the year's end. But I have not done it. I have read a good many novels—perhaps specimens, at least, of all our best novelists; but, in what I have to say, I have no objection that you

should consider me as one speaking of the composition of the mass, in virtue of having inserted the tasting-scoop into it at a good many points; and I shall trust a good deal to your own acquaintance with recent novels for the extension and correction, as well as for the corroboration, of my statements. What I propose to do is, first, to classify, in some sort of manner, the British novels that have made their appearance in the interval between Scott and our two great living representatives of a distinct style of prose fiction, Dickens and Thackeray—tracing certain general features in the miscellaneous aggregate, and alluding, as far as my knowledge serves me, to certain works of peculiar mark; then to say something of Dickens and Thackeray especially, and of their effects on Prose Fiction; then, to indicate certain tendencies of British novel-writing discernible, I think, in the works of one or two writers who have come into the field since Dickens and Thackeray were in divided possession of it; and lastly, in continuation of this, and by way of appropriate close to these lectures, to indulge in a few speculations as to the possibilities of the British Novel of the future.

In a classification of British novels from the date of Scott's first occupation of the domain of Prose

Fiction, it is in accordance with what we might expect that we should find a considerable space occupied by (1) THE NOVEL OF SCOTTISH LIFE AND MANNERS, either in direct imitation of Scott, or in continuation and extension of his patriotic illustrations. This is, accordingly, what we do find. By far the largest proportion of those whom we have named as Scottish writers of fiction after Scott—Galt, Mrs. Johnstone, Miss Ferrier, Hogg, Allan Cunningham, Lockhart, Wilson, Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, Picken, and Moir—devoted by far the largest proportion of their labour in this walk to the composition of pictures and stories of Scottish life. In all of them, so far as they followed this line of fiction, Scott's influence may be traced; but there are few of them in whom—whether by reason of independent peculiarities of their minds, or by reason of their having been natives of other parts of Scotland than that to which Scott belonged, or by reason of their having gone through different courses of Scottish experience from his—a peculiar and original vein of Scotticism is not discernible. Thus, in Hogg we have more of the humble shepherd-life of the Scottish Lowlands; in Galt and Picken, more of the shrewd West-country Scottish life; and, I may add, in Hugh Miller's *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*,

more of the life and character of that part of Scotland where the Norse or Scandinavian borders on the Celtic. In one of his novels also, Galt carries his Scotchman across the Atlantic, and so exhibits Scotticism at work amid conditions in which Scott had never placed it. Finally, from Lockhart and Wilson, as men of extra-Scottish scholarship and culture, though they also selected native themes for their fictions, and grew up in close relations to Scott, we have illustrations of Scottish life and manners, conceived in a different literary spirit, and presenting different characteristics. In Wilson's *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life,* and in his other Scottish stories, we have, unless my impression of them deceives me, a spirit of lyrical pathos, and of poetical Arcadianism, which tinges, without obscuring, the real Scottish colour, and reminds us of the Lake poet and disciple of Wordsworth, as well as of the follower of Scott; while in his *Noctes Ambrosianæ,* he burst away in a riot of Scotticism on which Scott had never ventured—a Scotticism not only real and humorous, but daringly imaginative and poetic, to the verge of Lakism and beyond—displaying withal an originality of manner natural to a new cast of genius, and a command of resources in the Scottish idiom and dialect unfathomed even by Scott. Wilson's "Ettrick Shep-

herd" is one of the most extraordinary creations of recent prose fiction. But it is not only novelists of Scottish birth that have occupied themselves, since Scott, in delineating Scottish nature and Scottish humours and characters. As Wordsworth purposely made the hero of his "Excursion" a Scottish pedlar, so, from the time of Scott to the present day, not a few English novelists have paid Scotland the compliment of treating it as an ideal land of rugged sublimity, both physical and moral, nearer to primeval nature, and less civilized and sophisticated than other parts of the British dominions, and have either laid their scenes there, or have fetched thence occasional characters, with all their Doric about them, to demean themselves among the Southerns in a way very different from that of such older literary representatives of the Scot as MacSarcasm and MacSycophant. For an example I may refer to Mr. Kingsley's Sandy Mackaye in *Alton Locke*—the cynical old Scotchman who keeps a book-stall in London, beats fallacies out of the young tailor by his talk, and rectifies, to a considerable extent, whatever is wrong in his neighbourhood.

Besides the Scottish Novel, however, or the novel with Scottish character and circumstance in it, there has been (2) THE NOVEL OF IRISH LIFE AND MAN-

NERS. This had been initiated, as we have seen, by Miss Edgeworth and practised by Miss Owenson and others before Scott had established the corresponding Scottish Novel; but, as was natural, the example of what Scott had done for the sister-land helped to stimulate new Irish genius in the patriotic direction. Besides some of the later tales of Miss Edgeworth, we have, therefore, as specimens of the Irish Novel since Scott, the fictions of Banim, Crofton Croker, Griffin, Carleton, and Lover, and some of those of Mr. Lever, and Mrs. S. C. Hall.

As regards (3) THE NOVEL OF ENGLISH LIFE AND MANNERS, it may be said, I think, that, though there have been specimens of it, there has been a deficiency of the variety that would exactly correspond to the Scottish Novels and the Irish Novels, as just described. Seeing that the majority of the British Novelists since Scott have been Englishmen or Englishwomen, they have, of course, laid their scenes in England, and have, in a sense, made the delineation of English life and manners a professed part of their purpose. In this sense, Lady Caroline Lamb, Mr. Peacock, Theodore Hook, Mr. Plumer Ward, Mr. Disraeli, Sir Bulwer Lytton, Mrs. Gore, Mrs. Trollope, and, later still, Lady Blessington, Miss Martineau, Mr. Samuel Warren, Douglas Jerrold,

Mrs. Crowe, Miss Jewsbury, Mr. Lewes, Mr. Shirley Brooks, Mrs. Marsh, Miss Mulock and others have all been novelists of English life—some of them continuing the exquisite style of English domestic fiction which had been begun by Miss Austen, and others introducing original peculiarities into the novel, and extending its range farther over the surface and more into the corners of English life. In their hands, however, or in the hands of most of them, the Novel of English life and manners has not had that express nationality of character which is found in the contemporary Scottish and Irish Novels. Whether from the very variety of life and manners over so broad a country as England —Yorkshire exhibiting one set of characteristics, Devonshire another, Kent and Sussex another, and so on; or whether because what could be done in the way of a novel of national English characteristics had already been done to a sufficient extent by Fielding and others of the eighteenth century, and there remained no such interest for British readers in that English system of life which was becoming the normal and conventional one for all, as in the outstanding bits of still unbooked barbaresque presented by Scotland and Ireland—certain it is that, in most of the novelists I have named, we have

only a certain sublimation of English life as presented or supposed to be presented in the uppermost layers of society over the country at large, or as concentrated in London and its suburbs. In the tales of Miss Mitford, and in some of those of Theodore Hook, Mr. Peacock, and perhaps also of Sir Bulwer Lytton and some others, without taking into account Dickens and Thackeray, I believe there *are* illustrations of English nature and life in their non-conventional and non-metropolitan varieties; and it is worthy of remark that of late this tendency to the illustration of the outstanding barbaresque and primitive in English society itself has been gaining strength. Miss Brontë made a refreshing innovation in English novel-writing when she drew her characters and scenes and even portions of her dialect from her native Yorkshire; Mrs. Gaskell has followed with her pictures of artisan life, and her specimens of provincial dialect in Lancashire; and Mr. Kingsley has broken ground, as an artist, in Devonshire and other counties. There are rich fields of yet unbooked English life both in northern and in southern England; and the literary centralization of English life in London has been owing, perhaps, to the centralization of the literary craft itself there.

Out of this centralization, however, there has

sprung (4) THE FASHIONABLE NOVEL, as it has been called, which aims at describing life as it goes on in the aristocratic portions of London society and in the portions immediately connected with these. Belgravia, Mayfair, and the West End of London generally are the topographical seats of this kind of Novel—saving, of course, that at Christmas, and after the Opera and Parliamentary season, the lords, baronets, ladies, wits, and footmen, who figure in them, are dispersed into the country or even as far as Scotland and the Continent. Representatives of this style of novel, are Lady Caroline Lamb, Theodore Hook again, Mr. Disraeli, Sir Bulwer Lytton again, Mrs. Gore, Mrs. Trollope, Lady Blessington, &c. But another kind of Novel, also perhaps the result of the same centralization of literary attention on the metropolis, has been (5) THE ILLUSTRIOUS CRIMINAL NOVEL, of which the most celebrated specimens have been Sir Bulwer Lytton's *Paul Clifford* and Mr. Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*. I need hardly say that this kind of novel, though dealing with roguery and criminal adventure, is by no means the same as that exemplified by Fielding in his "Jonathan Wild," or as the Spanish picaresque novels, or even as Defoe's illustrations of outlaw life in his day.

But Fiction gets tired of having its attention fixed on the Metropolis, just as Novelists get tired of living in it; and hence, by way of variety, we have had what may be called (6) THE TRAVELLER'S NOVEL, the nature of which is that we are taken in it beyond the British Islands, usually in the train of "fashionable" people, and are made to roam over the Continent, or to reside in Paris, or at German spas, or in Florence or other Italian cities. In most of the Fashionable Novels we have something of this; but several of the novels of Sir Bulwer Lytton, and more still of Mrs. Gore's and Mrs. Trollope's, belong in a special manner to the class now designated. Mr. Thackeray also, after *his* peculiar fashion, will now and then take us, with the Kickleburys or some other English family, up the Rhine. Varieties of the Traveller's Novel, worthy of being separately classed, are (7 and 8) THE NOVEL OF AMERICAN MANNERS AND SOCIETY, of which Mrs. Trollope, Captain Marryat, and, to some extent, also Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray have given us specimens, and THE ORIENTAL NOVEL, or NOVEL OF EASTERN MANNERS AND SOCIETY, of which we have had specimens in the Persian and Indian novels of Mr. Morier, Mr. Bailie Fraser, and others. These two kinds of Novel, in as far as they lead us, in a right spirit,

over new regions of natural scenery and new social fields, are by no means unimportant.

I may name as two additional kinds of Novel, in which the interest also arises in a great degree from imaginary locomotion, (9 and 10) THE MILITARY NOVEL and THE NAVAL NOVEL—the first represented in such stories of military life and adventure as those of Mr. Gleig, Mr. Maxwell, Mr. Lever, and, more incidentally, in parts of Thackeray's fictions; the second in the sea-stories of Captain Marryat, Captain Chamier, Mr. James Hannay, Mr. Cupples, and others. In some of these naval novels of later times, besides much of the interest to be found in such older sea-novels as those of Smollett, arising from the representation of sailor-characters and the incidents and humours of ship-life, whether as packed up on board ship or as let loose, to the discomfiture of landsmen, in port-towns, there is much of another sort of interest, not found in Smollett's sea-stories, and indeed alien to the literature of that day—the interest arising from the poetry of the sea itself, and from the relations of the hearty fellows, not only to each other in the gun-room and mess-room, but also to the vast element on which they float, and to the clouds that scud and the hurricanes that blow over the wilderness of waters. In this conjunction of two

sets of relations—the relations of the men to each other as individuals of the same crew, pursuing their voyage together, and the relations of the crew as a whole to the visible infinity in which they pursue their voyage, through which fly the omens which they mark, and over which hover and shriek the demons which they dread—the sailor's life is typical poetically of human life in the general. Something of this notion has caught some of our later sea-novelists; and it is not now only the jealousies and the practical jokes of the mess-room that they give us, but the superstitions also of the man at the wheel, or the yarns of the old sailors whiling away the calm of a starry night and exchanging the wild ideas of their marine religion, or the scene when all hands are on deck and the captain's voice is heard amid the storm, or when the ship is cleared for action, and Jack stands, no longer slouching and comical, but calm and magnificent, his breast and arms bare, the cannon levelled, and his match already at the touch-hole.

But, while we have had novels of real action and adventure of all kinds, there have not been wanting specimens, at least, of (11) THE NOVEL OF SUPERNATURAL PHANTASY. Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni*, are of this class; and

there are one or two of Douglas Jerrold's tales, as well as of Dickens's Christmas Stories, in which there is a poetic use of ghostly agency. Nor have there been wanting specimens of (12) what may be called THE ART AND CULTURE NOVEL, in which the purpose is to exhibit the growth and education of an individual character of the more thoughtful order. By far the greatest example of this species of fiction in modern literature is the "Wilhelm Meister" of Goethe; and there can be no doubt that that work, since it was translated, has had some influence on the aims of British novel-writing. Indeed, what is best in our fashionable novels seems to have arisen from an occasional desire on the part of those who practise such a style of fiction to make it subserve some such purpose. Some of Bulwer's novels are, perhaps, the nearest approach, in design, to the Art and Culture Novel that have been yet noticed among us; but I do not know that we have yet, or, at all events, that we have had till very recently, any very pure pecimens of the novel so designated.

All this while, as you will already have assured yourselves, we have by no means lost sight of (13) THE HISTORICAL NOVEL, to which the genius of Scott gave, while he lived, such vigour and predominance. Since the impulse which Scott gave to the historical

variety of prose fiction we have had historical novels in great, and even increasing, abundance. We have had Scotch historical novels of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from Galt, and romances of still older periods of Scottish history from Sir Thomas Dick Lauder and others; we have had Irish historical novels from some of the Irish novelists already mentioned; and, in extension of Scott's few, but splendid, inroads upon national English History, we have had English historical novels from Godwin, from Sir Bulwer Lytton (witness his *Harold* and his *Last of the Barons*), from Horace Smith, from Mr. Ainsworth, and, above all, from Mr. G. P. R. James. Mr. Kingsley, also, has ventured on this field afresh in his *Westward Ho!*; nay, Mr. Thackeray, too, in his *Esmond*, and Mr. Dickens in his *Barnaby Rudge*, where he describes the Gordon Riots. In the field of Continental History, broken in upon by Scott in his "Quentin Durward" and his "Anne of Geierstein," James has had a realm to himself, save for such an occasional intrusion as that of Bulwer Lytton in his *Rienzi*. It is observable also, that, though Scott's passion for the historical confined itself to the Gothic period of the European past, the taste for the historical in fiction or for the fictitious in history which he fostered has, since his time, overflowed the Gothic

area altogether, and extended beyond it both chronologically and geographically. Chronologically—for have we not had fictions of Classical History in Lockhart's *Valerius, a Roman Story*, in Bulwer's *Last Days of Pompeii*, in Mr. Wilkie Collins's *Antoninus*, in Kingsley's *Hypatia*, and in others still more ancient in their reference? Geographically—for, besides the novels of oriental society and manners already alluded to, have we not novels of oriental history? Of these the most celebrated, I believe, is Hope's *Anastasius, or Memoirs of a modern Greek, written at the close of the Eighteenth century.* It is sufficient to say of this novel, which is a description of the decrepit society of the Turkish Empire at the time indicated by the title, that some critics, including Baron Bunsen, praise it as of deeper epical import than any of Scott's.

I have thus enumerated, by way of rough and obvious, rather than considered and thorough classification, thirteen distinct varieties of the British novel, as in existence during the quarter of a century after Scott's influence had begun, and as in existence still. The classification, such as it is, has been made on external grounds, with reference to the different kinds of object-matter handled in the

novels. Had the classification been according to the different notions or styles of art employed in the treatment of the object-matter, whatever its kind, fewer heads might have sufficed. Thus, Sir Bulwer Lytton classifies all novels into the three kinds of the Familiar, the Picturesque, and the Intellectual—not a very scientific classification, but one which has an obvious meaning. Whichever classification we use—whether the external one, according to the matter, or the internal one, according to the style of treatment—Sir Bulwer Lytton himself may carry off the palm from all his coevals in respect of versatility. Take his own classification, according to styles of treatment, and he has given us Novels Familiar, Novels Picturesque, and Novels Intellectual. Take the other classification, according to the kinds of matter treated, and he has given us novels ranking under at least seven of the thirteen heads enumerated —to wit, the Novel of English Manners, the Fashionable Novel, the Novel of Illustrious Villainy, the Traveller's Novel, the Novel of Supernatural Phantasy, the Art and Culture Novel, and the Historical Novel. I say nothing of any other of Bulwer's merits besides this of his versatility, save that, of all British novelists, he seems to have worked most consciously on a theory of the Novel as a form of litera-

ture. This, indeed, may be the very cause of his versatility.

Of all the kinds of novel that I have mentioned, perhaps the most characteristic product of the time was, and is, the Fashionable Novel. I think we shall agree that this very popular form of fiction may now very safely be dispensed with—that no harm would attend its total and immediate extinction. Not that the classes of society whose feelings and doings this form of fiction professes to represent are classes whose feelings and doings are unimportant or uninteresting. Far from it. No one can be in any place where the members of these classes are gathered together, without feeling that, behind those faces, fresh or pale, haggard or beautiful, there are brains at work, more active than the average, and that those hearts, male or female, have their passions and their histories. Let whosoever is qualified tell forth the peculiar experience of those classes in any serious form that may be possible; and let what is ridiculous or despicable among them live under the terror of Michael Angelo Titmarsh. But in the Fashionable Novel, commonly so called, there is no sort of information at all. There is no soundness in it. Human life there is all resolved into that one interest, into which, as we are told, things had

resolved themselves also in the world before the Flood—the interest of marrying and giving in marriage. One could almost wish for another Flood, if that would put an end to it. At all events let us throw all the cold water upon it that we ourselves can. For, so far as other interests are bound up, in the Fashionable Novel, with that primary and fundamental one, the effect is but to add to the silliness, to make the frivolity more mischievous. In most Fashionable Novels, for example, there is a dash of politics. The two Houses of Parliament are appendages to that Vanity Fair in which the ladies and gentlemen move; and, so far as the gentlemen have any occupation in addition to flirtation, it is in the function of legislating for their country. The veteran baronet goes to the Commons after dinner, or retires to his blue-books; the young hero aspires to the representation of the county and a futurity as a Pitt or a Canning; changes of ministry and dissolutions are parts of the machinery of the novel; and always at some point of the story there are the humours of an Election. These things *are* in our social life, and represented they must be in our fictions, like any other social facts, and in full proportion; but, represented as they are in our Fashionable Novels—why, it is catering for Revolu-

tion! Parliament an appendage to Vanity Fair; legislation a relief from flirtation; those figures of gentlemen and ladies moving about in their charmed circle, and having *their* destinies, and the chances of *their* marriages affected by votes, changes of ministry, and dissolutions—why, where on earth, all this time, in the Fashionable Novelist's imagination, is the thing called the Country? Nay, and if there is serious political talk for a page or two, what talk it is! So and so—such and such a minister—"plays his cards well!" That is the phrase. Plays his cards well! Is Government, then, card-playing? In a sense it may be; for the suit is diamonds, and spades are the agricultural interest, and hearts too have to be played with, and, if politics is long considered card-playing, it may all end in clubs.

One of the best passages in *Bleak House* is a passage satirizing in real life that mode of talking about politics as an amusement of "fashionable" persons, which has reproduced itself in the Fashionable Novel. It is an account of the talk that went on at the Dedlock family mansion of Chesney Wold amid the guests there assembled—the chief colloquists being Lord Boodle and Mr. Buffy.

"He (Lord Boodle) perceives with astonishment that, supposing the present government to be overthrown, the limited

choice of the Crown in the formation of a new ministry would lie between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle—supposing it to be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with Goodle; which may be assumed to be the case, in consequence of the breach arising out of that affair with Hoodle. Then, giving the Home Department and the leadership of the House of Commons to Joodle, the Exchequer to Koodle, the Colonies to Loodle, and the Foreign Office to Moodle, what are you to do with Noodle? You can't offer him the Presidency of the Council; that is reserved for Poodle! You can't put him in the Woods and Forests; that is hardly good enough for Quoodle! What follows? That the country is shipwrecked, lost, and gone to pieces, because you can't provide for Noodle?

"On the other hand, the Right Honorable William Buffy, M.P., contends across the table with some one else, that the shipwreck of the country,—of which there is no doubt; it is only the manner of it that is in question,—is attributable to Cuffy. If you had done with Cuffy what you ought to have done when he first came into Parliament, and had prevented him from going over to Duffy, you would have got him into alliance with Fuffy; you would have had with you the weight attaching as a smart debater to Guffy; you would have brought to bear upon the elections the wealth of Huffy; you would have got in for three counties Juffy, Kuffy, and Luffy; and you would have strengthened your administration by the official knowledge and the business-habits of Muffy! All this instead of being, as you now are, dependent on the mere caprice of Puffy!"

Need I read more? If satire could annihilate nonsense, would not the Boodle and Buffy style of politics—which is very much that of our Fashionable Novels—have been by this time beyond the moon?

Prose Fiction in Britain—nay, in the rest of Europe and in America too—has received a fresh impulse and has taken on a new set of characteristics, since Dickens and Thackeray became, for us, its chief representatives. These two writers belong to the classic roll; they are now in their living activity, and the buzz of critics is about them; but a time will come when they shall have their settled places, and, the buzz having transferred itself to others whose turn of penance it will then be, they shall be seen in their full proportions relatively to the Fieldings and Smolletts and Sternes that went before them, and men, noting their differences in comparison with these, may assert also, more boldly than we, what shall seem their superiorities. Dickens, as you are aware, was the first in the field. His *Sketches by Boz* appeared in 1837 followed, within the next ten years, by his *Pickwick*, his *Nicholas Nickleby*, his *Oliver Twist* (previously published in magazine parts), his *Humphrey's Clock* (including *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*), his *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and several of his Christmas Stories. It was not till after these ten years of Dickens's established popularity, or till about the year 1847, that Mr. Thackeray —whose extraordinary powers had already, however, been long recognized within a limited circle of intel-

lectual men, in virtue of his numerous scattered publications and papers—stepped forth into equally extensive celebrity. His *Vanity Fair* was the first efficient proclamation to the public at large of the existence of this signal British talent, increasingly known since by the republication of those *Miscellanies* which had been buried in magazines and other periodicals, and by the successive triumphs of the *Snob Papers*, *Pendennis*, *Esmond*, the *Newcomes*, and various Christmas Books. Parallel with these had been running later fictions from Mr. Dickens's pen —*Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, and *Bleak House*. Mr. Dickens also had the last word in his *Little Dorrit*, until the other day, when Mr. Thackeray recommenced in his *Virginians*. For, with the two writers, according to the serial system, it seems to be, whether by arrangement or by necessity, as with Castor and Pollux; both cannot be above the horizon of the publishing world at once, and, when the one is there, the other takes his turn in Tartarus. But whether simultaneously visible or alternate, the two are now so closely associated in the public mind that whenever the one is mentioned the other is thought of. It is now Dickens and Thackeray, Thackeray and Dickens, all the world over. Nay, not content with associating them, people have got

into the habit of contrasting them and naming them in opposition to each other. There is a Dickens faction, and there is a Thackeray faction; and there is no debate more common, wherever literary talk goes on, than the debate as to the respective merits of Dickens and Thackeray.

Perhaps there is a certain ungraciousness in our thus always comparing and contrasting the two writers. We ought to be but too glad that we have such a pair of contemporaries, yet living and in their prime, to cheer on against each other. I felt this strongly once when I saw the two men together. The occasion was historic. It was in June, 1857; the place was Norwood Cemetery. A multitude had gathered there to bury a man known to both of them, and who had known both of them well—a man whom we have had incidentally to name as holding a place, in some respects peculiar, in the class of writers to which *they* belong, though his most effective place was in a kindred department of literature; a man, too, of whom I will say that, let the judgment on his remaining writings be permanently what it may, and let tongues have spoken of him this or that awry, there breathed not, to my knowledge, within the unwholesome bounds of what is specially London, any one in whose actual person there was more

of the pith of energy at its tensest, of that which in a given myriad anywhere distinguishes the one. How like a little Nelson he stood, dashing back his hair, and quivering for the verbal combat! The flash of his wit, in which one quality the island had not his match, was but the manifestation easiest to be observed of a mind compact of sense and information, and of a soul generous and on fire. And now all that remained of Jerrold was enclosed within the leaden coffin which entered the cemetery gates. As it passed, one saw Dickens among the bearers of the pall, his uncovered head of genius stooped, and the wind blowing his hair. Close behind came Thackeray; and, as the slow procession wound up the hill to the chapel, the crowd falling into it in twos and threes and increasing its length, his head was to be seen by the later ranks, towering far in the front above all the others, like that of a marching Saul. And so up to the little chapel they moved; and, after the service for the dead, down again to another slope of the hill, where, by the side of one of the walks, and opposite to the tombstone of Blanchard, Jerrold's grave was open. There the last words were read; the coffin was lowered; and the two, among hundreds of others, looked down their farewell. And so, dead at the age of fifty-four, Jerrold was left in

his solitary place, where the rains were to fall, and the nights were to roll overhead, and but now and then, on a summer's day, a chance stroller would linger in curiosity; and back into the roar of London dispersed the funeral crowd. Among those remitted to the living were the two of whom we speak, aged, the one forty-five, the other forty-six. Why not be thankful that the great city had two such men still known to its streets; why too curiously institute comparisons between them?

And yet, in instituting such comparisons, the public are guided by a right critical instinct. There can be no doubt that the two writers bring out and throw into relief each other's peculiarities—that they are, in some respects, the opposites of each other; and that each is most accurately studied when his differences from the other are noted and scrutinized.

But, first, as to their general resemblances. Both novelists belong, in the main, though by no means exclusively, to the order of Humorists, or writers of Comic Fiction. Moreover, under this distinction, both stand very much in the same relation to their predecessors in respect of the kind or kinds of fiction, previously in use, to which they have attached themselves, and in respect of the extension of range which that kind or those kinds of fiction have received at

their hands. The connexions of both at first were chiefly with that which we have distinguished as the Novel of English Life and Manners; and both, in working this kind of Novel, have added immensely to its achievements and capabilities in one particular field—that of the Metropolis. The Novels of Dickens and Thackeray are, most of them, novels of London; it is in the multifarious circumstance of London life and its peculiar humours that they move most frequently and have their most characteristic being. A fact not unimportant in the appreciation of both! As the greatest aggregate of human beings on the face of the earth, as a population of several millions crushed together in one dense mass on a space of a few square miles—this mass consisting, for the most part, of Englishmen, but containing also as many Scotchmen as there are in Edinburgh, as many Irishmen as there are in Dublin, and a perfect Polyglott of other nations in addition—London is as good an epitome of the world as anywhere exists, presenting all those phenomena of interest, whether serious or humorous, which result from great numbers, heterogeneousness of composition, and close social packing; besides which, as the metropolis of the British Empire, it is the centre whither all the sensations of the Empire tend, and whence the

motive currents issue that thrill to the extremities. If any city could generate and sustain a species of Novel entirely out of its own resources, it might surely be London; nor would ten thousand novels exhaust it. After all the mining efforts of previous novelists in so rich a field, Dickens and Thackeray have certainly sunk new shafts in it, and have come upon valuable veins not previously disturbed. So much is this the case that, without injustice to Fielding and others, Dickens and Thackeray might well be considered as the founders of a peculiar sub-variety of the Novel of English Life and Manners, to be called "The British Metropolitan Novel." As Londoners, however, do not always stay in London, or, while in London, are not always engrossed by what is passing there, so our two novelists both range, and range about equally, beyond the bounds of the kind of fiction thus designated. They do give us English life and manners out of London; nay, they have both, as we have seen, given us specimens also of their ability in at least two varieties of the Novel distinct from that of English life and manners—the Traveller's Novel, and the Historical Novel. If, in this respect of external range, either has the advantage, it is perhaps Dickens—who, in his Christmas stories, and in stories interspersed

through his larger fictions, has given us specimens of his skill in a kind of prose phantasy which Thackeray has not attempted.

In addition to the difference just indicated, critics have pointed out, or readers have discovered for themselves, not a few other differences between Dickens and Thackeray.

In the mere matter of literary style, there is a very obvious difference. Mr. Thackeray, according to the general opinion, is the more terse and idiomatic, and Mr. Dickens the more diffuse and luxuriant writer. There is an Horatian strictness and strength in Thackeray which satisfies the most cultivated taste and wins the respect of the severest critic; but Dickens, if he is the more rapid and careless on the whole, seems more susceptible to passion, and rises to a keener and wilder song. Referring the difference of style to its origin in difference of intellectual constitution, critics are accustomed to say that Thackeray's is the mind of closer and harder, and Dickens's the mind of looser and richer texture—that the intellect of the one is the more penetrating and reflective, and that of the other the more excursive and intuitive.

Passing to the substance of their novels, as composed of incident, description, and character, we are

able to give more definiteness to the popularly felt differences between the two novelists in this respect, by attending to the analogies between novel-writing and the art of painting. In virtue of his descriptions or imaginations of scenery, the Novelist may be considered along with Landscape and Object painters; and, in virtue of his characters and his incidents, along with Figure and Action painters. So, on the whole, we find the means of indicating a novelist's range and peculiarities by having recourse to the kindred craft for names and terms. On this plan we should have to say that, while both our novelists are masterly artists, the art of Dickens is the wider in its range as to object and circumstance. I may here use a sentence or two on this subject which I wrote for another occasion. "Dickens," I then said, "can give you a landscape proper—a piece of the "rural English earth in its summer or in its winter "dress, with a bit of water and a village spire in it; "he can give you, what painters seldom attempt, "a great patch of flat country by night, with the red "trail of a railway-train traversing the darkness; "he can succeed in a sea-piece; he can describe "the crowded quarter of a city, or the main street "of a country town, by night or by day; he can "paint a garden, sketch the interior of a cathedral,

" or photograph the interior of a hut or of a drawing-
" room; he can even be minute in his delineations
" of single articles of dress or of furniture. Take
" him again in the Figure department. Here he
" can be an animal painter, with Landseer, when
" he likes, as witness his dogs, ponies, and ravens;
" he can be a historical painter, as witness his
" description of the Gordon Riots; he can be a
" caricaturist, like Leech; he can give you a bit of
" village-life with Wilkie; he can paint a haggard
" scene of low city life, so as to remind one of some of
" the Dutch artists, or a pleasant family scene, gay or
" sentimental, reminding one of Maclise or of Frank
" Stone; he can body forth romantic conceptions
" of terror or beauty that have arisen in his imagi-
" nation; he can compose a fantastic fairy piece; he
" can even succeed in a dream or allegory, where the
" figures are hardly human. The range of Thackeray,
" on the other hand, is more restricted. In the land-
" scape department, he can give you a quiet little bit
" of background, such as a park, a clump of trees, or
" the vicinity of a country-house, with a village seen
" in the sunset; a London street also, by night or by
" day, is familiar to his eye; but, on the whole, his
" scenes are laid in those more habitual places of
" resort where the business or the pleasure of aristo-

" cratic or middle-class society goes on—a pillared " clubhouse in Pall Mall, the box or pit of a theatre, " a brilliant reception-room in Mayfair, a public " dancing-room, a newspaper office, a shop in Pater- " noster Row, the interior of a married man's house, " or a bachelor's chambers in the Temple. And his " choice of subjects from the life corresponds. Men " and women as they are, and as they behave daily in " the charmed circles of rank, literature, and fashion, " are the objects of Mr. Thackeray's pencil; and " in his delineations of them, he seems to unite the " strong and fierce characteristics of Hogarth, with " a touch both of Wilkie and Maclise, and not a " little of that regular grace and bloom of colouring " which charm us in the groups of Watteau." Within his range, the merit of superior care, clearness, and finish may be assigned to Thackeray; but there are passages in Dickens—such as the description of the storm on the East Coast in his *Copperfield* —to which, for visual weirdliness, there is nothing comparable in the pages of his rival.

As to the difference of ethical spirit, or of general philosophy, between the two writers, the public have come to a very definite conclusion. Dickens, it is said, is the more genial, kindly, cheerful, and sentimental; Thackeray, the more harsh, caustic, cynical,

and satirical writer. And, proceeding on this distinction, the two factions argue, consistently with it, in behalf of their respective favourites—the adherents of Dickens objecting to what they call Thackeray's merciless views of human life, and his perception of the mean at the roots of everything; and the adherents of Thackeray, on the other hand, maintaining the wholesome effect of his bracing sense in comparison with what they call Dickens's sickly sentimentalism. For us, joining neither of the factions, it is enough to recognise the fact of the difference on which they argue so constantly. The philosophy of Dickens certainly *is* the professed philosophy of kindliness, of a genial interest in all things great and small, of a light English joyousness, and a sunny universal benevolence; whereas, though I do not agree with those that represent Thackeray's writings as mainly cynical, but think that, in such characters as his Warrington, he has shown his belief in manly nobleness, and his power of representing it—yet it seems clear that the pervading philosophy of his writings, far more than those of Dickens, is that of a profoundly reasoned pococurantism, of a sceptical acquiescence in the world as it is; or, to use his own words in describing the state of mind of his hero Pendennis, "of a belief, qualified

with scorn, in all things extant." The difference is perhaps best seen, and with most advantage to Thackeray, when it is expressed negatively—that is, with reference not to what the two writers respectively inculcate, but to what they respectively attack and oppose. Stated so (but such a method of statement, it should be remembered, is not the fairest for all purposes), the philosophy of Dickens may be defined as Anti-Puritanism, whereas that of Thackeray may be defined as Anti-Snobbism. Whatever practice, institution, or mode of thinking is adverse, in Mr. Dickens's view, to natural enjoyment and festivity, against that he makes war; whereas that which Mr. Thackeray hunts out and hunts down everywhere is Snobbism. Although, in their positive forms, both philosophies are good, perhaps in their negative applications Mr. Thackeray's is the least liable to exception. Anti-Snobbism, it may indeed be admitted, is not a perfect summary of the whole decalogue; but, in the present day, and especially in and about London, it is that which most nearly passes for such a summary; and, seeing that there is no question anywhere but that Snobbism is a bad thing, and little difficulty anywhere in knowing what it is, Mr. Thackeray's doctrine is one to which there needs be less hesitation in wishing universal

good speed than to the corresponding doctrine of his rival—a doctrine which would too hastily extinguish that, about the nature of which, and its proper varieties, there may well be much controversy. Farther, it is to Mr. Thackeray's advantage, in the opinion of many, that in his satires in behalf of Anti-Snobbism, or of any other doctrine that he may hold, it is men and their modes of thinking and acting that he attacks, and not social institutions. To do battle with the vanity, the affectation, the insincerity, the Snobbism, that lies under each man's own hat, and actuates each man's own gestures and conduct, is Mr. Thackeray's way; and rarely or never does he concern himself with social anomalies or abuses. In this respect he is singularly acquiescent and conservative for a man of such general strength of intellect. Mr. Dickens, on the other hand, is singularly aggressive and opinionative. There is scarcely a social question on which he has not touched; and there are few of his novels in which he has not blended the functions of a social and political critic with those of the artist, to a degree detrimental, as many think, to his genius in the latter capacity. For Mr. Dickens's wonderful powers of description are no guarantee for the correctness of his critical judgments in those particulars

to which he may apply them. "We may owe one "degree of respect," I have said, "to Dickens, as "the describer of Squeers and Creakle, and quite "another degree of respect when he tells us how he "would have boys educated. Mr. Spenlow may be "a capital likeness of a Doctors' Commons lawyer; "and yet this would not be the proper ground for "concluding Mr. Dickens's view of a reform in the "Ecclesiastical Courts to be right. No man has "given more picturesque illustrations of London "criminal life; yet he might not be equally trust-"worthy in his notions of prison-discipline. His "Dennis, the hangman, is a powerfully conceived "character; yet this is no reason for accepting his "opinion on capital punishments." And yet how much we owe to Mr. Dickens for this very opinion-ativeness! With his real shrewdness, his thought-fulness, his courage, what noble hits he has made! The Administrative Reform Association might have worked for ten years without producing half of the effect which Mr. Dickens has produced in the same direction, by flinging out the phrase, "The Circum-locution Office." He has thrown out a score of such phrases, equally efficacious for social reform; and it matters little that some of them might turn out on inquiry to be ludicrous exaggerations.

All these differences, however, between Dickens and Thackeray, and still others that might be pointed out, resolve themselves into the one fundamental difference, that they are artists of opposite schools. Thackeray is a novelist of what is called the Real school; Dickens is a novelist of the Ideal or Romantic school. (The terms Real and Ideal have been so run upon of late, that their repetition begins to nauseate; but they must be kept, for all that, till better equivalents are provided.) It is Thackeray's aim to represent life as it is actually and historically —men and women, as they are, in those situations in which they are usually placed, with that mixture of good and evil and of strength and foible which is to be found in their characters, and liable only to those incidents which are of ordinary occurrence. He will have no faultless characters, no demigods— nothing but men and brethren. And from this it results that, when once he has conceived a character, he works downwards and inwards in his treatment of it, making it firm and clear at all points in its relations to hard fact, and cutting down, where necessary, to the very foundations. Dickens, on the other hand, with all his keenness of observation, is more light and poetic in his method. Having once caught a hint from actual fact, he generalizes

it, runs away with this generalization into a corner, and develops it there into a character to match; which character he then transports, along with others similarly suggested, into a world of semi-fantastic conditions, where the laws need not be those of ordinary probability. He has characters of ideal perfection and beauty, as well as of ideal ugliness and brutality—characters of a human kind verging on the supernatural, as well as characters actually belonging to the supernatural. Even his situations and scenery often lie in a region beyond the margin of everyday life. Now both kinds of art are legitimate; and each writer is to be tried within his own kind by the success he has attained in it. Mr. Thackeray, I believe, is as perfect a master in his kind of art as is to be found in the whole series of British prose writers; a man in whom strength of understanding, acquired knowledge of men, subtlety of perception, deep philosophic humour, and exquisiteness of literary taste, are combined in a degree and after a manner not seen in any known precedent. But the kinds of art are different; and I believe some injustice has been done to Mr. Dickens of late, by forgetting this when comparing him with his rival. It is as if we were to insist that all painters should be of the

school of Hogarth. The Ideal or Romantic artist must be true to nature as well as the Real artist, but he may be true in a different fashion. He may take hints from Nature in her extremest moods, and make these hints the germs of creations fitted for a world projected imaginatively beyond the real one, or inserted into the midst of the real one, and yet imaginatively moated round from it. Homer, Shakespeare, and Cervantes, are said to be true to nature; and yet there is not one of their most pronounced characters exactly such as ever was to be found, or ever will be found in nature—not one of them which is not the result of some suggestion snatched from nature, in one or other of her uttermost moments, and then carried away and developed in the void. The question with the Real artist, with respect to what he conceives, is, "How would this actually be in nature; in what exact setting of surrounding particulars would it appear?" and, with a view to satisfy himself on this question, he dissects, observes, and recollects all that is in historical relation to his conception. The question with the Ideal artist is, "What can be made out of this; with what human conclusions, ends, and aspirations can it be imaginatively interwoven, so that the whole, though attached to nature by its origin, shall

transcend or overlie nature on the side of the possibly existent—the might, could, or should be, or the might, could, or should have been?" All honour to Thackeray and the prose-fiction of social reality; but much honour, too, to Dickens, for maintaining among us, even in the realm of the light and the amusing, some representation in prose of that art of ideal phantasy, the total absence of which in the literature of any age would be a sign nothing short of hideous. The true objection to Dickens is, that his idealism tends too much to extravagance and caricature. It would be possible for an ill-natured critic to go through all his works, and to draw out in one long column a list of their chief characters, annexing in a parallel column the phrases or labels by which these characters are distinguished, and of which they are generalizations—the "There's some credit in being jolly here" of Mark Tapley; the "It isn't of the slightest consequence" of Toots; the "Something will turn up" of Mr. Micawber, &c., &c. Even this, however, is a mode of art legitimate, I believe, in principle, as it is certainly most effective in fact. There never was a Mr. Micawber in nature, exactly as he appears in the pages of Dickens; but Micawberism pervades nature through and through; and to have extracted

this quality from nature, embodying the full essence of a thousand instances of it in one ideal monstrosity, is a feat of invention. From the incessant repetition by Mr. Dickens of this inventive process openly and without variation, except in the results, the public have caught what is called his mannerism or trick; and hence a certain recoil from his later writings among the cultivated and fastidious. But let any one observe our current table-talk or our current literature, and, despite this profession of dissatisfaction, and in the very circles where it most abounds, let him note how gladly Dickens is used, and how frequently his phrases, his fancies, and the names of his characters come in, as illustration, embellishment, proverb, and seasoning. Take any periodical in which there is a severe criticism of Dickens's last publication; and, ten to one, in the same periodical, and perhaps by the same hand, there will be a leading article, setting out with a quotation from Dickens that flashes on the mind of the reader the thought which the whole article is meant to convey, or containing some allusion to one of Dickens's characters which enriches the text in the middle and floods it an inch round with colour and humour. Mr. Thackeray's writings also yield similar contributions of pithy sayings applicable to

the occasions of common talk, and of typical characters serving the purpose of luminous metonymy—as witness his Becky Sharps, his Fokers, his Captain Costigans, and his Jeameses; but, in his case, owing to his habit rather of close delineation of the complex and particular as nature presents it, than of rapid fictitious generalization, more of the total effect, whether of admiration or of ethical instruction, takes place in the act of reading him.

The imitations, direct and indirect, of Thackeray and Dickens are, I need not say, innumerable. It is owing to their extraordinary popularity that, while all those forms of the novel which I enumerated at the beginning of this discourse, are still in practice amongst us, such a preponderance has within the last few years been attained by what may be called the Metropolitan Comic Fiction, or the Novel of Cockney Fun—a kind of fiction which has degenerated in some hands into something so frivolous that the sooner it ends the better. Of late years, however, there have been signs among us, I believe, of the rise of a new kind or of new kinds of novel-writing, differing not only from this wretched novel of metropolitan fun, but also from the established styles either of Dickens or of Thackeray. The

change can hardly be assigned to any particular year; but it may be convenient to date it from the eventful year 1848.

If I am not mistaken, the year 1848 will have to be referred back to for several generations to come as an epoch commencing much in European history. It was not only that then a wave of democratic revolution passed over the face of Europe, overthrowing thrones and constitutionalizing for a moment absolute governments, and that this movement was followed by a reaction, apparently restoring what had been cast down, but in reality leaving all out of equilibrium, and bequeathing a heritage of wars the duration of which no one can calculate. It was that at this instant of political commotion, and involved in the commotion itself, partly as cause and partly as immediate effect, there was an outburst into the intellectual atmosphere of Europe of a whole set of new ideas and speculations previously latent or in course of formation in individual minds, or within the precincts of philosophical schools, but then irrecoverably let loose into the general consciousness, to exist as so much theory, baulked of all present realization, but on that very account elaborating itself more fiercely in meditation and in verbal controversy, and overhanging more visibly the social fabric on whose

towers and foundations it means to topple down. It was not without significance, for example, that the short-lived French Republic of 1848 called itself *La République Démocratique et Sociale.* By the addition of the second adjective it was meant that the new Revolution proceeded on principles and involved ends which had not existed in the great prior Revolution of 1789, and that, in addition to the ideas of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity which that Revolution had promulgated and formulized, this carried in it a set of ideas, excogitated since, and trenching more deeply upon established human arrangements—the ideas that had been forming themselves in the minds of Saint-Simonians, Fourierists, and other speculative Parisian sects, and that had assumed for their general designation the vague word Socialism. Associated with these novelties of Socialism which were flung into the European atmosphere, chiefly from France, at the date under notice, were others, of different origin geographically—some capable of being comprehended under the same name as tending to radical social changes, others more purely speculative in form, and appertaining to the traditional questions and variations of theology. Altogether there mounted into the intellectual air of Europe in or about the year 1848 an unusual quantity of speculation that, with

respect to the popular or general mind, might be called new; and it still hangs there like a cloud. At every moment in the world's history existing society has thus had hanging over it a certain accumulation of recent theory freighted with changes about to be precipitated; but it may be questioned whether within human memory there has been a time when the accumulation was so large and various as at present. Take the Continent, and what do we see there? As a flooring, still nothing else but the old Papal and Imperial organization which was concluded to be condemned long ago; and over this flooring, in full march to and fro, populations who believe neither in Papacy nor in Empire! Or let us look nearer home! Was there ever a time when Britain contained within it a greater mass of esoteric opinion at variance with existing profession and practice—when, if the entire population, and especially the leading men in it, were polled on oath as to their beliefs on matters most fundamental, a greater crowd would have to walk to the farther end? It is not only our "representative institutions" that are at present on trial.

Now, as all this has been represented in some degree in our popular literature, so it has been represented, perhaps most distinctly of all, in our

literature of prose fiction. It is in the nature of this species of literature, as I have already said, to take a more powerful hold than Verse can do of those eddies of current fact and opinion, as distinct from the steadier undercourse of things, which, in the language of those who look more to the eddies than to the undercurrent, constitute a social crisis; and, if so, then, whether in attending to the eddies, or in trying to dive, with epic Verse, down to the undercurrent, the Novel of the present has and may have plenty of work. My acquaintance with the British novels of the last ten years is not sufficiently detailed, to make me sure that I can indicate all the tendencies of our novel-writing discernible since the time when Dickens and Thackeray were in divided possession of the field, or even that I can cite the instances that would best illustrate the tendencies which I do indicate; but, with allowance for these defects, the following observations may pass as true:—

(1.) In the first place, and generally, I think it is to be perceived that of late—and this to a great extent from the influence of Mr. Thackeray's example—there has been a growth among our novel-writers of a wholesome spirit of Realism. To borrow a phrase from a kindred art, a spirit of conscious Pre-Raphaelitism has invaded this species of

literature. Not that here, any more than in our metrical poetry, or in the art of painting itself, the practice of those special merits which are now signalized by the term Pre-Raphaelitism is new. As there were painters who painted truly, minutely, and carefully before Pre-Raphaelitism was heard of; as Wordsworth long ago preached a revolution in Poetry akin to that which the Pre-Raphaelites have advocated in painting; and as Crabbe practised long ago in his verse a Pre-Raphaelitism of the harder sort—so among our novelists there have never been wanting examples of the most persevering and painstaking accuracy. Richardson, Fielding, and Miss Austen certainly painted from the life. Of late, however, there seems to have been, among our practitioners of the novelist's art, a more general and conscious cultivation of the virtue inculcated in Pre-Raphaelitism—shown, first, in the more resolute and careful attention of novelists to facts and characters lying within the range of their own easy observation; secondly, in a disposition to go in search of facts and characters lying somewhat beyond that range, as painters carry their easel into unfamiliar localities; and, thirdly, in a greater indifference to traditional ideas of beauty, and an increased willingness to accept, as worthy of study and representation, facts

and objects accounted common, disagreeable, or even painful. In illustration, I may refer again to the representations of previously unexplored tracts of provincial English scenery and life in the novels of Miss Bronte, Mrs. Gaskell, Miss Mulock and others—to the minute speciality with which in these novels physiognomies and places are described; the range which they take among the different professions, crafts, and classes of society, as each possessing its peculiar habits and cast of thinking; and the use in them all, when occasion serves, of the local dialect or of racy provincialisms. It is as if, proceeding on the theory that the British Novel, in its totality, should be a Natural History of British life, individual novelists were acting farther on the principle of subdivision of labour, and working out separately the natural histories of separate counties and parishes. With Thackeray presiding in the centre, as director of the metropolitan museum, and observer-in-chief of the Middlesex district, though with the liberty of an excursion hither and thither as he chooses, there are scores of others at work gathering facts specially in Berkshire, Yorkshire, Lancashire, &c., some of them with the talent of accomplished masters in the whole field of the science. Sir Bulwer Lytton has not disdained in his more recent novels

to ply the functions of a quiet naturalist; and at this moment readers are hailing the advent of a new artist of the Real school, in the author of *Adam Bede.*

In that kind of Natural History, however, which may thus form the business of the Novel, a larger proportion of the phenomena are phenomena purely of the present than in Natural History proper. The mineralogy, the botany, the zoology of Britain, or of its districts, are tolerably constant from year to year, so that labourers in these departments apply their successive efforts to an accumulation already nearly fixed; and even in the more varying annual meteorology the variations from year to year are not so great as they seem. In those facts, on the other hand, to which the Novelist with analogous aims has to direct his attention, the rate of vicissitude is rapid. Human nature comes down the same in its essentials; customs and institutions are also perpetuated from generation to generation; but over this tolerably solid basis there rolls in every generation an assemblage of facts, psychological and political, held for the meantime in vital solution and suspense, as the immediate element in which the generation breathes, though soon also to fall down as sediment, a thin additional layer to the stratification foregone.

Yet, as we are now regarding the Novel, it is precisely to these purely contemporary facts—these "humours" of the present, as Ben Jonson used to call them—that the Novelist is supposed to owe his closest attention. It is the tendency of Realistic art—as commonly defined, at all events—to direct attention very particularly to all such circumstances of contemporary interest. Hence, to the full extent to which the operation of this kind of Naturalism in art has prevailed in British novel-writing during the last ten years, we observe an influx into British novels of those very sorts of circumstance which the decad itself has so plentifully generated. Not only have the actual movements and occurrences in Europe during these ten years—the Parisian Revolution of 1848, the Hungarian and Italian wars, the Crimean war, &c.—served as definite events with which to associate fictitious incidents; but there has been a determination also to ideal incidents and situations of the order of those historically recent—political conspiracies, club-meetings, strikes in the manufacturing districts, mill-riots, &c.; while, as additions to the novelist's traditionary stock of ideal characters, we have had the Socialist, the Red Republican, the Foreign Refugee, the Government Spy, the young Chartist Orator, the Emancipated Woman.

and the like. In especial, within Britain, there has been a determination to make representatives of all classes of clergymen and of all religious creeds sit for their photographs in Novels—the Jesuit priest, the Roman Catholic pervert, the High-Church parson, the Broad-Church parson, the Low-Church parson, Curates of all the varieties, the Dissenting Preacher, the Methodist, the Unitarian, the Philosophical Sceptic, the Spiritualist, the Positivist, and even the Mormonite. In proof of the tendency of the Novel thus to pluck its materials out of the most characteristic and recent facts of the political and speculative imbroglio of the time, it is enough to recollect again the later novels of Thackeray and Sir Bulwer Lytton, or any of Kingsley's, Mrs. Gaskell's, or Miss Bronte's. If the Real is to be represented in Novels, are not Puseyism, Socialism, Positivism, &c. among the last buddings of the Real? Deep, indeed, in the present time, might the art of the Realist go, if the Realist had courage to be what he pretends. With all our professions of representing what is exactly as it is, do we not as yet, Novelists and all of us, keep cunningly near the surface?

(2.) It is impossible, however, for the Novelist or for any other artist to limit himself to the mere function of representing what he sees. However dis-

passionate his mind, however determined he may be to regard the facts around him as so many objects to be observed, studied, represented, and nothing more, there will always be more or less of purpose blended with the representation. All creations of poetic art, nay even all transcripts from nature by the historian, inasmuch as they are actuated by some mood or state of mind, have doctrine or purpose worked into them, and may on due analysis be made to yield it. The very choice of such and such facts to be represented, to the exclusion of others, is a manifestation of purpose, of preference, of moral intention. "When we would philosophise, we philosophise; when we refuse to philosophise, then also in that very thing we philosophise; always and necessarily we do philosophise." There is evidently room, however, for large gradation in this respect, in the interval between those novels and poems which, being constructed as far as may be on the principle of pure representation, have their purpose involved and buried in the fact that they are necessarily allegories of the mind, or of some portion or phase of the mind, that produced them, and those other novels and poems, frequent in every time, which avow a didactic aim. To these last in a more special sense, may be given the name, Novels or Poems of

Purpose. Now, it is in accordance with what has been said concerning the state of Britain and of Europe during the last ten years, that the proportion of Novels of such a kind—Novels made in the service not of "contemporary fun" merely, but also of contemporary earnest—should have been on the increase. Such, at all events, has been the fact; and so in addition to the increase and extension of a persevering spirit of realism, we have to report, as characteristic of British novel-writing recently and at present, a great development of the Novel of Purpose.

Not only, for example, have we had novels representing duly, as interesting phenomena of the time, Chartism, Socialism, &c., in the sphere of secular politics, and Anglo-Catholicism, Evangelicism, Broad Church, &c., in the sphere of ecclesiastical opinion; we have also had novels in which the doctrines distinguished by these, or by other names, have been either inculcated, or satirized and reprobated, separately or jointly—Roman Catholic novels, Anglo-Catholic novels, Evangelical novels, Broad-Church novels, Christian Socialist novels, Temperance novels, Woman's Rights novels, &c. Hardly a question or doctrine of the last ten years can be pointed out that has not had a novel framed in its

interest, positively or negatively. To a great extent tales and novels now serve the purpose of pamphlets. There are, of course, all varieties of merit in such novels, according to the nature of the doctrine propounded, and the depth of humanity and power of imagination allied with the special belief. In some cases, the story is made so mechanically to the order of the dogma, and by a person of such shallow and narrow sympathies, and so destitute both of knowledge and of poetic genius, that the result is but a lifeless sequence of silly incidents, or a fierce polemical tirade. Illustrations of an opposite kind, exhibiting liberality of sentiment and genius naturally poetical powerfully at work under the inspiration of strong speculative convictions of a general order, and even of precise conclusions on current social questions, are to be found, I believe, in novels put forth from very different quarters of the theological and political world, but nowhere so conspicuously as in those of Mr. Kingsley.

By far the highest class of recent novels of purpose have been some which might be recognised by themselves, as constituting a peculiar group in the variety mentioned, under the name of the Art and Culture Novel, in our classification of British Novelists since Scott, and then spoken of as comparatively

rare among us. The novels I mean are those which, concerning themselves or not, in a dogmatic manner, with the specialities of present political or ecclesiastical controversy, and being usually indeed the productions of minds not disposed to over-estimate such specialities, even when they artistically deal with them, address themselves rather to that deeper question of fundamental faith as against fundamental scepticism, which is proclaimed everywhere as the one paramount fact of the age—embodying certain views on this question in the supposed education of an imaginary hero, or of several imaginary personages together, who pass through various intellectual stages to attain one that is final. In all novels whatsoever, of course, the hero passes through a series of mental stages, the usual goal or consummation being an all-consoling, all-illuminating marriage. But in the Art and Culture novel, as I consider it, the design is to represent a mind of the thoughtful order, struggling through doubt and error towards certainty and truth; and the interest arises from the variation given to that one text which the poet has thus typically expressed:

> "Though now he serves me but perplexedly,
> Yet will I soon to clearness bring him thorough:
> Knows well the gardener from the greening tree
> That flower and fruit will deck the coming morrow."

But though this text might be prefixed to all the novels of the class now under consideration, the interpretations actually given to it in different novels of the class are as various as the notions entertained by the different writers of novels, as to what constitutes remediable "perplexity," and as to what may be the maximum of attainable "clearness." Let me glance at some of the more clearly marked varieties in this respect.

There are, first, those whose notions of the morality to be inculcated, of the "clearness" to be attained, are moderate. Their reasoning, if it were to be articulately expressed, might take some such form as this: "Men complain of the doubt and uncertainty " by which their thoughts and actions are perplexed; " but, after all, are there not many things suf- " ficiently certain, if people would take the " trouble to find them out, and enter them in their " inventory of ascertained truths? A man's creed " consists and must consist in those things, what- " ever they are, which he has no doubt about; all " else is not his creed, but only his wish, his fancy, " or an element of alien belief through which he " navigates, more or less honestly, and more or less " conformably, by the rudder of his own. Accept- " ing this definition, and giving no place in one's

" creed, properly so called, to any proposition that
" could be ranked as dubitable, might not one still
" compose for one's self a very respectable creed by
" simply collecting all the known truths, all the
" clear indubitabilities, within one's reach? One
" might commence, if need were, with the law of
" gravitation; about which, surely, there exists,
" out of Ireland, no doubt to speak of. On this,
" as a basis, one might pile, without much effort,
" a considerable body of other equally certain
" truths—truths mechanical, truths chemical, truths
" physiological; nay, it would surely be hard if one
" could not top the pyramid with a number of very
" important truths, rationally or historically ascer-
" tained, relating to man's social connexions, and
" his conduct in life—truths economical and pruden-
" tial, furnished out of individual experience, or out
" of the repertory of the sciences which refer to
" industry and its fruits; truths political of kindred
" origin; and such truths ethical as are embodied in
" the time-honoured maxims, 'Honesty is the best
" policy,' 'Be just and fear not;' together with
" whatever of more delicate and nicely evolved con-
" viction might form an appropriate apex. This,
" they say, is an age of intellectual anarchy; but
" such a complement of ascertained truths is even

" now possible to any man; and, unless one be all
" the more exacting in one's demands, and all the
" more difficult to rule, it is possible that, with
" such a complement of truths firmly in his posses-
" sion, he might go through the world steadily,
" honourably, and usefully. But this possession
" is not born with a man; it has to be acquired.
" Man comes into the world regardless and un-
" formed; he has to lay down in his mind gradually,
" and one by one, even the fundamental blocks of
" his belief, and thereon to build whatever may
" come as superstructure. Even the knowledge of
" the law of gravitation is not innate in the child,
" but has to be acquired by painful efforts, and a
" succession of tumbles. And so with truths of the
" more complex sciences, and with truths of the
" moral and social order, the acquisition of which
" last, and still more their effective incorporation in
" the consciousness, so as to become a living and
" active faith, are processes extending, in almost
" every instance, far beyond the early period of life.
" Now, in so far as the novelist makes it his aim to
" exhibit, by fictitious examples, this process of the
" formation of character, or of the culture of the
" individual by circumstance and by reflection, his
" task will consist in nothing less than this—the

" conduct of his imaginary hero through his period
" of ignorance, empty-mindedness, aimless and unre-
" gulated impulse, and consequent error, on to that
" point, where, by the successive strokes upon him
" of the offended natural laws, the fatigue of his
" successive buffetings with an element which always
" throws him back, and perhaps also the fortuitous
" occurrence of some happy juncture which lets in
" the light upon him in a sudden gush, and renders
" his obedience to law thenceforth easier, he comes
" into effective possession of such a complement of
" doctrine as, though it may not finish or satisfy
" him outright, may fit him for good citizenship,
" and serve him passably through the rest of life.
" Why this process of imaginary education should
" so frequently take the form of a love-story, pro-
" tracted and complicated by oppositions of fate,
" separations, misunderstandings and even infideli-
" ties, but ending in a suitable marriage, is obvious
" enough. Not to mention other reasons, a very large
" proportion of those peculiar ethical problems the
" solution of which is necessary to impart something
" like finality to a man's creed and character, and so
" to frank him as a full citizen of the body politic,
" are problems which are supposed to be best stated
" in the history of a passionate and thwarted love,

" and to receive their solution most naturally at the
" moment and through the agency of marriage. The
" most common forms of 'perplexity' are such that
" the Novelist is only true to nature when he repre-
" sents the 'perplexity' as vanishing and the 'clear-
" ness' as coming in the arms of Rosa or Emily.
" There the long perturbed youth attains to light and
" calmness; there he repudiates the doubts and the
" moral heresies of his bachelorhood, and wonders
" how he could ever have entertained them; there
" he crowns his faith with the articles yet wanting
" to it, or conforms to the faith which he finds esta-
" blished. As the ancients said of men when they
" died, so it may be said of men when they marry,
" *Abeunt ad plures:* 'they go over to the majority.'
" At this point, therefore, the Novelist in ordinary
" does well to take leave of them—not only because
" the interest in them is gone for one half of his
" readers, but also because he has led them on to
" a natural epoch in their existence. If he chooses,
" however, he may follow them still farther, and
" exhibit the process of their education as continued
" in their new circumstances, on to a second mar-
" riage or to any other conclusion that he may fix,
" including death itself."

It is on the principles so explained that most

specimens we have of the peculiar kind of the Art and Culture Novel now under consideration are consciously or unconsciously constructed. Mr. Thackeray, for example, pilots young Pendennis past the syren Blanche Amory, and leaves him, wiser for his wanderings, in the haven of Laura's love. And so, in others of his novels, in so far as he intends them to be of the class under notice, the scepticism or ignorance or mental perplexity of his hero is represented as terminating, and the better frame of mind is represented as arriving, in the event of marriage—save that (herein redeeming his philosophy of character from the charge of facility that might otherwise attach to it) he is in the habit of making the heroes of his former novels reappear in their new capacity as married men in his subsequent ones, and reappear still fallible and with something farther to seek. The scepticism represented as characterizing young Pendennis during his period of education, and until Warrington and Laura have cured him, is, I think, about the extreme, whether as regards kind or as regards extent, that is ever represented in our recent Art and Culture Novels of the more temperate order :—

"The truth, friend!" Arthur said impatiently, "where is the truth? Show it me. That is the question between us.

I see it on both sides. I see it on the Conservative side of the house, and amongst the Radicals, and even on the Ministerial benches. I see it in this man, who worships by Act of Parliament, and is rewarded with a silk apron and five thousand a-year; in that man who, driven fatally by the remorseless logic of his creed, gives up everything, friends, fame, dearest ties, closest intimacies, the respect of an army of churchmen, the recognised position of a leader, and passes over, truth-impelled, to the enemy, in whose ranks he is ready to serve henceforth as a nameless private soldier. I see the truth in that man, his brother, whose logic drives him to quite a different conclusion, and who, after having passed a life in vain endeavours to reconcile an irreconcilable book, flings it at last down in despair, and declares, with tearful eyes and hands up to heaven, his revolt and recantation. If the truth is with all these, why should I take side with any one of them? . . Yes; I *am* a Sadducee; I take things as I find them, and the world and the acts of parliament of the world as they are, and as I intend to take a wife, if I find one—not to be madly in love and prostrate at her feet, like a fool—but to be good-natured to her and courteous, expecting good-nature and pleasant society from her in turn. And so, George, if ever you hear of my marrying, depend on it, it won't be a romantic attachment on my side; and if you hear of any good place under government, I have no particular scruples that I know of which would prevent me from accepting your offer." —"O Pen, you scoundrel, I know what you mean," here Warrington broke out.

This, I say, is about the extreme measure and nature of the scepticism that is treated in any of the novels now under consideration; and Mr. Thackeray deserves credit for having so boldly, in a work of fiction, grasped so serious a phenomenon. Few of

our recent novelists perhaps have been so explicit. Yet the novel from which the above quotation is made may stand as the type of a class becoming more common. As Mr. Thackeray leads Pendennis out of the condition of mind so represented on to a final condition, in which, though there is no express repudiation of some parts of the foregoing declaration, yet there is an infusion of more positive tenets and the total spirit is braver and more manly, so, and by an analogous process, do other novelists conduct their heroes on through a period of listlessness and moral aberration to a resting-ground of faith. There are, however, sub-varieties of method and of general aim. I do not know that we have had any novels of this kind written distinctly in the interest of that philosophy which abjures all theology whatever, regards the theological habit in any form as a vice or a weakness, and proclaims it as the highest wisdom

> "To apprehend no farther than this world,
> And square one's life according."

In actual novels, however, confining themselves as they usually do to the incidents of a secular life, we have, not unfrequently, something tantamount. The "perplexity" they represent is the perplexity of the

ordinary struggle with fortune and the ordinary weakness and impulsiveness of youth; and the corresponding "clearness" at the end is the clearness of a settled worldly position and a morality sufficiently disciplined to hold and enjoy it. Most frequently, however, there *is* a certain conventional recognition of the theological element; and, as a portion of the youth's "perplexity" is represented as consisting in his relaxed hold of religious doctrines and his relaxed attention to religious observances, so in the ultimate "clearness" there is usually involved a coming round again at marriage to the forsaken creed and the neglected worship. A pew is taken in the ivy-clad parish church; and, while the heroine, now the wife, will attend service twice on Sundays, the hero, now the husband, will make it his regular practice to go at least once.

Mr. Kingsley and others who might be associated with him have taught this peculiar novel of purpose a bolder flight. Admitting that there is a definite complement of truths relating to human procedure which may be ascertained by reason, experience, and a scientific study of the natural laws, and admitting, moreover, that a man will behave better or worse in this world, according as he has made up this secular kind of creed well or ill for himself, or has inherited

it in perfect or imperfect condition from those who have educated him, they yet maintain the inadequacy of any such conceivable complement of prudential or ethical truths self-evolved for the full satisfaction and regulation of the human being, and the necessity of a deeper faith, a faith metaphysical, in which these very truths must be rooted ere they can function so powerfully as they might, or even retain, strictly speaking, any right to this name of "truths" under which they announce themselves. To undertake the voyage of life with no other outfit than this body of so-called secular doctrine, would be at best, they hold, to sail in a ship well-trimmed in itself and under good sanitary regulation, but with no port in view, no compass, no reference to anything without the ship, not even to the sea in which it floats. Such seamanship as that would be which professed only an attention to the internal economy of the ship itself, and a neglect of its relations to the very element in which it moved, such, they think, would that doctrine of human life be which professed to apprehend only within the visible bounds of life and to fabricate the final rule out of what might be perceptible there. Life *is* a voyage; the element is time; there *is* a port in the coming eternity. Nor is man left without the necessary knowledge whereby

this voyage is to be governed. Deep in the structure of the human mind itself, when it is duly investigated, there are found certain bonds of evident connexion between it and the world of the metaphysical; certain truths which the mind cannot but think, without ceasing to be and abnegating the possibility of any stroke of truth thereafter; certain principles the conjunction of which *makes* it mind and determines the extent and the mode of its grasp; certain marks, so to speak, of its fracture from the body of the unseen universal. Out of the study of these, they say, arises Natural Religion—that kind of Religion which has always been in the world, and always will be in the world, all contrary philosophy notwithstanding, so long as the world wheels on its axle, bears suffering and sorrow on its bulk, and turns its hemispheres alternately to the vaults of the stars. But this, they say, is not all. It has not been permitted to this world to wheel on in that faint kind of light, scarce better than darkness, which wells forth from the human mind itself, preying eagerly on its own metaphysical roots, and carrying in it some few obscure ideas, some confused Platonic recollections, of the infinity whence it feels itself distorn. A Revelation has been given. Once and again from the outer realms of mystery

a great light has struck our wheeling earth—struck it till its bosses beamed and glittered. Of old it came flutteringly through prophets and scattered men of God; last of all and conclusively it came, it came at Nazareth. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds." Yes, "heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds!" Backward from that point in the earth's history the light extends, involving the very beginnings and the offsets; and forward from that point it also extends, suffusing itself through all things, and involving the ends and the upshots. Let philosophies form and accumulate themselves, all will end in Christianity; let there be wars and revolutions, and let states and commonwealths rise and succeed each other, all are but preparations towards that kingdom of Christ wherein all will be included, for all things are His inheritance. And so with individual men now; be they what they may, all is incomplete within them, they are not fully men, until Christianity has occupied their being. This faith may, indeed, exist where it is not suspected to be, and it may not be, alas! where it is

least supposed to be absent; but be it must wherever man is to be essentially man, and life is to be at its highest potency. And so, wherever in literature, whether in history, in poem, or in novel, life is to be represented, and, above all, wherever the scheme is to exhibit the formation of character and the progress of an individual mind through doubt and error to final certainty and truth, this recognition of Christianity as the supreme principle ought to be, with those who adopt the argument, unremittingly and unmistakeably present.

A while ago, the introduction of such considerations in connexion with such a form of literature as the Novel might have seemed absurdly irrelevant. In connexion with Metrical Poetry they might have seemed, in virtue of many precedents, relevant enough; but they would have seemed out of relation to all or to almost all known precedents in modern prose fiction. That this is no longer the case is owing to no one more evidently than to Mr. Kingsley. Not in that spirit, common enough among previous novelists of purpose, which simply treated orthodoxy as a part of established social propriety, and therefore attributed it to the hero or brought the hero over to it, as a matter of course, but in a spirit far more resolute and

thoroughgoing, does he uphold in his novels the necessity of Christian purpose. Whatever objections may be taken to his method, and whatever may be thought of his success, there can be no mistake as to his intention. His very rhetoric is surcharged, to the extent of a vehement mannerism, with the phrases of his Theology; and there is not one of his novels that has not the power of Christianity for its theme. In his splendid historical novel of *Hypatia* we have a representation of a mind exercised amid the conflicts of a world all in chaos, with the Goths breaking through its old Polytheistic fabric and a vague Platonism bidding here and there for the possession of its leading Pagan minds, till at length the sole refuge is found in the conquering faith of the Christians. In his *Westward Ho!* the purpose similarly is to show how Christianity, in its form of free Elizabethan Protestantism, lived and worked in the manly minds of an age about the manliest that England has seen, and inspired them to actions and enterprises the noblest in English history. And so, in his tales of present life, he is always fully alive to the struggle between belief and unbelief and between various forms both of the one and of the other, which makes existing society what it is; and he either asserts positively the sole and supreme efficiency of

Christianity for the adequate rule of life in these latter days as in those that have gone before, exhibiting its applications to what may seem the most peculiar contemporary problems, or he suggests the same conclusion by the fictitious shipwreck of all that cannot, by a due latitude of interpretation, be brought within the Christian definition. What Mr. Kingsley has done in this respect has been done also in a simpler walk of fiction and with reference to a more definite order of interests, by the author of *Tom Brown*. Here, in the story of the education of an English schoolboy, there is the same argument as in Mr. Kingsley's works for the supreme competency of Christian principle in the formation of character; and, though the immediate scene is but a public school, and the incidents are those of schoolboy life, yet, by the ultimate reference of all that happens for good in this little world to the influence of Dr. Arnold, not only is the extension of the argument to society at large irresistibly suggested, but the argument itself is all the more impressively enforced by being associated with the memory of the man who was so emphatically its representative. Having a basis of historic truth in its relation to such a man, enforcing its lesson with such direct honesty, and charged in every sentence

with the very spirit of English manliness, little wonder that the book went straight to the popular heart, that its effects on the minds both of boys and of parents were immediate, and that the author was instantly recognized as a man from whom readers, tired of namby-pamby, might expect more books of the right Saxon sort.

Compared, however, with Christianity as usually understood among the existing sects, the Christianity whose competency to all modern intellectual wants and to all modern social problems is thus proclaimed by Mr. Kingsley and by others might certainly appear to be Christianity with a difference. The concomitants, it is satirically suggested—beer, tobacco, the boxing-gloves, athletic exercises in general, and a general readiness at all times to resort to the knock-down method of action and to fight like a genuine John Bull—are not the concomitants recognized in the usual definitions of Christianity whether in the Greek or in the Latin Fathers. "More is the pity," reply the teachers who are attacked; but, not shrinking even from the historical question so proposed, they cite their proofs that the effective Christianity of all times has been of the brave and manly and liberal kind which they seek to inculcate, and they argue that the Christianity which some of

the sects would substitute for it is but a weak dilution of the authentic creed. The Christianity which such men as Tertullian, St. Augustine, and Luther professed—the Christianity of the days when England was England, and Elizabeth sent her Drakes and Raleighs to do English work against the Devil and the Spaniard, or Cromwell led his Ironsides to battle for the right—this, they say, and not any attenuated Christianity, whether of dry modern dogmatists or of feeble modern pietists, is the Christianity that will still be found capable of all the work, all the difficulties, of our own present world, from our busy England on through the rest of Europe, and so through Asia, Africa, and America, with Australia to boot. Taking them at their word, but still with an implied jest at the large proportion of the above-mentioned concomitants in their representations of English Christianity as it might be, the critics have goodhumouredly closed the controversy by affixing to the doctrine of Mr. Kingsley and his school a witty nickname. They have called it the doctrine of "a muscular Christianity," and the heroes in whom it is embodied in their novels "muscular Christians." There is only about as much justice in the nickname as there is in nicknames in general; but it has become current, and the writers at whom

it is aimed have too much relish for humour to be anxious to protest against it. Indeed, if they were in want of a reason for letting it circulate, they might find one in an advantage which it might give them by way of retort. In the present day, they might say with some truth, the alternative with not a small number of minds seems to be between this school of theirs of "a muscular Christianity" and a contemporary school of "nervous Paganism." For, side by side with Mr. Kingsley and his school, or rather beyond them, and occupying a bleaker and more extreme standing-ground on the plain of speculation, are a body of thinkers—not unrepresented either in our literature of prose fiction—whose characteristic it is that they also are incessantly ruminating the same high problems of the metaphysical, without having the privilege of rest in the same solution.

It has long been a subject of remark, and generally of complaint, that so much of our Poetry is of the "subjective" kind—*i. e.* representative of the passing feelings, phrenzies, doubts, longings and aspirations of the minds who are able so to express themselves, rather than of the vast world of fact, lying fixed, whether in the past or in the present, beyond the troubled bounds of the poet's own con-

'sciousness. From the time of Byron and Shelley we have had a succession of poems exhibiting individual minds of the thoughtful order shattered to their very foundations by passion and scepticism, at war with all the institutions of society, and bellowing to earth and heaven their sense of Nature's cruelty and of their own utter wretchedness. Recently there has been a farther peculiarity in this kind of poetry which has attracted the notice of critics. Poets have begun, as if systematically, to make imaginary Poets their heroes. On opening a recent book of poetry, the chance is that it is a Poet that will be found soliloquizing, conversing with his friend, watching the moonlight with his mistress, or blaspheming his destiny on a bridge at midnight. The opportunity so given for ridicule is obvious. "Why this perpetual writing about poets? Is there "not the great world of action, from Adam down-"wards, to supply themes? What percentage of "the human race would all the poets alive amount "to, that the human race is thus called upon so "peremptorily to contemplate them and their "whistlings? Does a shoemaker make shoes for "himself alone; or does a painter always paint "himself at his easel? What was poetry meant to "be but holding the mirror up to nature? Why

" this perpetual holding up of the mirror to the " poet's own insignificant physiognomy, with nothing " but its wooden unreflecting back to all the leagues " of contemporary landscape, and to all the tide of " life through six thousand years?" Now, though there is much natural temptation to such comments, they are essentially unfair. That phenomenon of intellectual restlessness, which is exhibited over and over again in the poems in question, is a phenomenon of universal time, intermingled with all that is and with all that has been; and, in exhibiting it, the poet is not neglecting the world of past and present fact, but is only educing from its multifarious circumstance that which is recurring and fundamental. Moreover, though the phenomenon appertains to all time, it has so gained in visibility in the present age of the world, that it presses more palpably for representation. Is not speculative anarchy proclaimed everywhere as the fact of all others most characteristic of our time; and is there not a larger number of minds than ever there was before, revolving over and over again the same abstract problems, and, indeed, debarred by the arrangements of the time from any other habitual occupation? If poets, in the actual sense, are still but a small minority of the body-politic, they are at least on the increase; and

the class of persons, for whom imaginary poets may stand as representatives and who will read the imaginary histories of such poets with interest, is a class not only widely diffused but also socially authoritative. In short, if a poet is thrown on a "weak piping time of peace" what is there for him to represent as contemporary save the weakness and the piping?

The same reasoning would apply to the very special class of novels which corresponds with the poems in view. Such novels are, indeed, as yet rare—Verse having hitherto reserved mainly for itself themes so high and dangerous. But specimens are not wanting of fictitious representations in prose of mental perplexity at its uttermost, not ending in Mr. Kingsley's happy solution. Recent works of prose fiction might be named in which, as in recent poems, a poet or some personage of the purely intellectual class is the hero, and the story is that of his progress through the very blackness of darkness, with only natural reason, or the revelation that can come through reason, as his guide. There is the mind preying on its own metaphysical roots; there is the parting, piece by piece, with the old hereditary faith, and yet all the remaining torture of the ceaseless interrogation which that faith satisfied; there are the pangs of

love despised or disprized; there is the burden of sin and the alternate sullenness and madness of despair. Sometimes the "clearness" is represented as coming, and then in one or other of a few well-known forms. The happy marriage may be an occasional agency; but, even where it is admitted, its effect is but auxiliary. Sometimes the mind under probation is made to ascertain for itself that its perpetual metaphysical self-torture, its perpetual labour on questions which cannot be answered, is a misuse of its faculties, and so to take rest in the philosophic conclusion that "man was not born to solve the problem of the universe, but to find out where the problem begins, and then to restrain himself within the limits of the comprehensible." When this is the solution adopted, however, the result is represented as by no means the same as in the case previously imagined of a mind that has never exercised itself on the problems of the supernatural at all, but has secured its comfort from the outset by voting the supernatural to be non-extant, and proceeding to pile up, as one's sufficient creed, a few average certainties of the secular. No; these average certainties are, indeed, more eagerly adopted now because they may have been neglected heretofore, and a satisfaction is found that was not anticipated in science and art and all the

multiform use and investigation of the world as it is; but the mind retains in it a touch of "the demonic" to witness to its old wanderings; it works now with a higher and less calculable potency; through the shell of darkness that enspheres the visible world, there glimmers the gauzy light of a world believed in, though pronounced impenetrable; as the little island of life is tilled and cultivated, it is at least still known to be an island, and there is still heard in its midmost fields the roar of the surrounding sea. Or, again, sometimes there is more than this merely negative conclusion. The mind in its gropings has seized some actual belief, supernatural in its reference, which it will not afterwards let go, and which anchors it howsoever it ranges; or a dead hand, it may be, seems stretched in one's behalf from the world of spirits; or it is as when Dante walked on earth and there hovered ever before him, interpretative of all around and apocalyptic of all beyond, the vision of his beatified Beatrice. Generally, too, as a part of one or other of these solutions, there is an assertion of the sanative virtue of action, of the power of work to dispel doubt and despair, and to heal a mind fevered by excess of speculation. And so at the close, as in *Maud*, there is the glimpse of some enterprise into which the

mind, recovering its reason, may plunge, and in which, though it is lost to view, the fancy may follow its beneficent activity.

> "And as months ran on and rumour of battle grew,
> 'It is time, it is time, O passionate heart,' said I
> (For I cleaved to a cause that I felt to be pure and true),
> 'It is time, O passionate heart and morbid eye,
> That old hysterical mock-disease should die.'
> And I stood on a giant deck, and mix'd my breath
> With a loyal people shouting a battle cry,
> Till I saw the dreary phantom arise and fly
> Far into the North, and battle, and seas of death."

Perhaps, however, the most characteristic of the special class of fictions which we have been describing are those in which "clearness" is not represented as coming at all, but which confine themselves merely to a statement of the question. The perpetual knocking at the unopened door—such is their image of human life. This is Nervous Paganism at its uttermost; and one or two specimens of it in our prose-literature, not actually calling themselves novels, but really such, might be specified, were it not that their authors would feel a reluctance to being named. *Muscular* Pagans would not mind it.

(3.) In addition to the tendency to a wider and more persevering Realism, and also to the marked tendency to more of doctrinal and didactic earnest-

ness in all directions, there may be reported, respecting our recent and contemporary novel-writing, the appearance here and there of more of purely poetic aim, and of a larger power and liberty in the ideal. While, on the one hand, our novelists are striving after a closer rendering of life as it is throughout all ranks of society and all professions, on the other hand, we find in some novelists, and sometimes where this virtue of Realism exists in high degree, a disposition to vindicate for the novel also that right of ideality which is allowed to metrical Poetry, and so to introduce in their novels incidents, scenes, and characters not belonging to the ordinary world, but holding their tenure from the sway of phantasy. I have already named Mr. Dickens as a novelist in whom the poetic capability is strongly developed. There are portions also of Miss Bronte's novels where the imagination breaks away from social fact and exercises itself in visual and other allegories; and in Mr. Kingsley's bold descriptions of scenery, his heroic and impassioned conceptions of character, and the romantic sequence of his incidents and situations, there is as marked an inroad as has been made in recent prose fiction into the peculiar domain of the Poet. The mere citation of such instances will suffice to explain what is meant; and I would

only observe farther that, as in such novelists there is more and more of the higher matter of poetry, so, wherever this is the case, their language too assumes more and more of the poetical and even of the metrical form. As Mr. Dickens and Mr. Kingsley, for example, may be associated, in virtue of much of the matter of their writings, with such elder prose-poets as Wilson and De Quincey (and these two, it is to be remembered, take rank also among our novelists), so from *their* writings, too, passages might be extracted which might be read, with scarce an alteration, as good unconscious verse.

There are no symptoms yet that the Novel is about to lose its popularity as a form of literature. On the contrary, there is every symptom, that in one shape or another it will continue to be popular for a long time, and that more and more of talent will flow into it. The very remarks which we have been making as to the recent tendencies and characteristics of our British novel-writing are proofs to this effect. The Novel, we have found, has been becoming more real and determinate, in so far as it can convey matter of fact, more earnest, in so far as it can be made a vehicle for matter of speculation, and more conscious, at the same time, of its ability in

all matter of phantasy. What is this but saying that its capabilities have been increasing simultaneously as regards each of the three kinds of intellectual exercise which make up total literature—History, Philosophy, and Poetry; and what is this again but saying, that in future there may be either a greater disposition among those who naturally distribute themselves according to this threefold classification to employ it for their several purposes, or a greater desire among those who are peculiarly novelists to push its powers in the threefold service? On such a supposition, we may venture, in conclusion, on three hopes as to the Novel of the future, corresponding severally to the three tendencies which have been indicated as most conspicuous in the Novel of the present:—

I. In the interest of the Novel considered in its relations to History, or as a form of literature representing the facts of human life, there might be a more general recognition than heretofore, both among Novelists and their readers, of the full theoretical capabilities of the Novel, as being the prose counterpart of the Epic. In other words, there might be more attention among our novelists of real life to epic breadth of interest.

I may illustrate my meaning by a particular

instance of the defect I have in view. It will not be denied, I think, that, by the conversion of the Novel, in the hands of the majority of modern novelists, and especially of lady-novelists, into a mere love and marriage story, there has been a serious contraction of its capabilities. Of Love, as an influence in human affairs, it is impossible either for History or for Romance to exaggerate the importance. Over every portion of human society, from the beginning of the world till now, over every little hand's-breadth of British or of any other society at this moment, there has waved, there is waving, the white hand of Aphrodite. And what effects of the white hand wherever it waves—what sweet pain, what freaks and mischiefs, what trains of wild and unforeseen events, what derangements and convulsions, not confined to the spots where they begin, but sending forth circles of tremor, which agitate all interests, and ripple sometimes to the thrones of kings! Through love, as a portal, man and woman both pass, at one point or another, ere they are free of the corporation of the human race, acquainted with its laws and constitution, and partakers of its privileges. That this feeling then, and all that appertains to it, should receive large recognition in literature, that representations of it should be multi-

plied, and that histories should be constructed to exhibit it, is right and necessary; nor can any history or fiction be accounted a complete rendering of all life in which this particular interest is omitted or made insignificant. But there are other human "interests"—if we may use that hacknied word—besides Love and Marriage. There are other deities in the Polytheistic Pantheon besides Aphrodite. There is Apollo, the physician and artist; there is Minerva, the wise and serene; there is Juno, the sumptuous and queenly; there is the red god, Mars; not far off sits green-haired Neptune; all around is Pan, the wood-rover; and down upon all, the resting bolt in his hand, looks the calm and great-browed Jove. It was the action and interaction of these deities that, in the Pagan philosophy, produced life—Venus having only her characteristic part; and, if for deities we substitute principles, the same is true yet. Exactly, therefore, as, in the Homeric Epic, the whole Pantheon was engaged, and Venus appears but now and then to wave her hand and have it wounded, so, to constitute a true modern epic, there must be the like subordination, the like variety. And, indeed, in almost all the greater novelists, whether of our own or of other countries—Richardson being one of the exceptions—

and certainly in all the greatest narrative and dramatic poets, this breadth of interest, this ranging of the mind over a wide surface of the phenomena of human life, has been a conspicuous characteristic. In Cervantes we have all Spain to range over. In Shakespeare's dramas we have love in abundance, and, at least, some thread or hint of love in each; but what a play throughout of other interests, and in some how rare the gleam of the white hand amid the spears of warriors and the deliberations of senates! So in Scott; and so in almost every other very eminent novelist. That so many of our inferior novels now should be love and marriage novels and nothing more, arises perhaps from the fact, that the novel-reading age in the one sex falls generally between the eighteenth and the twenty-fifth year, and that, with the other sex, in the present state of our social arrangements, the "white hand" remains, directly or indirectly, the permanent human interest during the whole of life.

II. In the interest of the Novel, considered as a vehicle for doctrine, a very considerable influx into it both of the speculative spirit and of the best results of speculation, is yet to be desired.

The question of the proper limits within which a poet or other artist may seek to inculcate doctrine

through his works, is one on which something has already been said in connexion with those recent novels which we have named Novels of Purpose. It is, however, a question, the complete discussion of which would involve many farther considerations.

On the one hand, the popular distaste for works of art evidently manufactured to the order of some moral or dogma is founded on a right instinct. The art of Shakespeare in his dramas, as it is and always has been more popular than the art of Ben Jonson in his, is also deeper and truer in principle. Moreover, it may be said, there is a certain incompatibility between the spirit in which an artist proceeds, and the spirit in which a teacher or dogmatist ought to proceed, if he is true to his calling. It is the supposed essence of a work of art that it shall give pleasure; but perhaps it is the test of efficient doctrine that it shall give pain. The artist may lawfully aspire to be popular; the teacher who aspires to popularity does so at his peril. It might be a true testimony to the power of an artist that the crowd were crowning him with laurel in the market-place; but respecting a moralist, or spiritual reformer, a truer testimony might be that they were taking up stones to stone him. Works of art and imagination are such that those who produce them

may live by their sale, and not necessarily be untrue to their function; the very worst feature in our modern organization of literature is that so many literary men must live by the sale of *doctrine.* When doctrine has to be sold to enable its producer to go on producing more, there is a grievous chance that the doctrine last sold, and the farther doctrine in preparation will, more or less consciously, be of a kind to be saleable. True, the labourer even in doctrine is worthy of his hire; but he will labour perhaps better if he is in circumstances not to require any. In the ancient Greek world it was the men who were called Sophists who took fees for their teaching; the philosopher Socrates had his bread otherwise. He earned his bread by sculpture, of the quality of which we do not hear much; by his philosophy, of the quality of which we can judge for ourselves, all that he got from the public in his life was a cup of hemlock. But, though we thus regard it as the distinction between the true Greek philosophers and the contemporary Sophists that the Sophists taught for hire and the philosophers gratuitously, we do not extend the inference to the Greek dramatists. They probably expected to be paid handsomely, as well as to be applauded, for their dramas; and yet their dramas were such as

we see. And so, in the case of the modern novel, what chance is there for the novelist of attaining his legitimate end as an artist, that of communicating and diffusing pleasure, if he aims also at reforming society by a strenuous inculcation of doctrine, which, in so far as it is good and calculated for the exigency, ought almost necessarily to irritate?

Now, without waiting to detect a certain amount of fallacy which mingles with the general truth of such an argument, it might be enough to fall back on the consideration already adduced—that every artist, poet, or novelist is also a thinker whether he chooses or not. The imagination is not a faculty working apart; it is the whole mind thrown into the act of imagining; and the value of any act of imagination, therefore, or of all the acts of imagination of any particular mind, will depend on the total strength and total furnishing of the mind, doctrinal contents and all, that is thrown into this form of exercise. Every artist is a thinker, whether he knows it or not; and ultimately no artist will be found greater as an artist than he was as a thinker. The novelist chooses a certain portion of life to be imaginatively represented; well, there is latent doctrine in the very choice. He is the providence of the mimic world he has framed; well, he must

conduct it, consciously or unconsciously, according to *some* philosophy of life. He makes his characters reason and act in different situations and in modes calling for approbation or reprobation; well, he is, in spite of himself, a good or a bad moral casuist. Now, to the extent to which these obvious facts carry us, is it not to be wished that our novelists brought to their business a fair amount of scientific capital, a fair amount of acquaintance with the best thoughts that may be current on the subjects of greatest interest and importance? Is the wish unnecessary? It hardly appears to be so. If there is any kind of literary attempt to which a mind empty of all knowledge is apt nevertheless to think itself quite competent, is it not to writing a novel? And what havoc, in our actual novels, of the most simple and certain principles! The very element in which the novelist works is human nature; yet what sort of Psychology have we in the ordinary run of novels? A Psychology, if the truth must be spoken, such as would not hold good in a world of imaginary cats, not to speak of men—impossible conformations of character; actions determined by motives that never could have determined the like; sudden conversions brought about by logical means of such astounding simplicity that wonder itself

is paralyzed in contemplating them; chains of events defying all laws of conceivable causation! How shaky also the Political Economy and the Social Science of a good many of our novelists—sciences in the matter of which they must work, if not also in that of some of the physical sciences, in framing their fictitious histories! Before novels or poems can stand the inspection of that higher criticism which every literary work must be able to pass ere it can rank in the first class, their authors must be at least abreast of the best speculation of their time. Not that what we want from novelists and poets is further matter of speculation. What we want from them is matter of imagination; but the imagination of a well furnished mind is one thing, and that of a vacuum is another. Respecting some kinds of novels—those included, for example, in the more profound order of what we have called novels of purpose—our demands might be higher. That a writer may be fitted to frame imaginary histories illustrating the deeper problems of human education, and to be a sound casuist in the most difficult questions of human experience, it is necessary that he should bring to his task not only an average acquaintance with the body of good current doctrine, but also an original speculative faculty. In such

cases, the desirable arrangement might be either that our novelists were philosophers, or that philosophers were our novelists.

III. In the interest of the Novel, considered as a variety of general Poetry, there might be a more decided assertion of its competency for the higher as well as for the lower exercises of the poetic faculty, of its fitness for representations of the grand, the elemental, the ideal, as well as for representations of the socially minute, varying, and real. In other words, there might, with advantage, be a protest, within certain limits, and especially at present, against the exclusive practice of what is called the novel of social reality. I have so often touched on this topic that it may be well here somewhat to vary my language in returning to it. Several times I have used the word "elemental" as synonymous, or nearly so, with the word "ideal," and as perhaps less objectionable, inasmuch as it avoids the notion of opposition to the "real" which this latter word is apt to suggest, and which is not intended. Let me now, therefore, confine myself to that word, and explain more distinctly what is meant by it.

The old doctrine of the Four Elements is now naught in Science; but there is a lingering validity in it, in respect that to the merely intuitive eye the

four elements recognised in it still seem to compose the totality of nature, and yet to be distinct among themselves. There is the brown and stable Earth, mineral or organic; round its massive bulk roars and surges the fluid element of Water, here collected in oceans, there distributed in streams; over Earth and Water alike blows the fickle element of Air, deepening, as the eye ascends, from invisible transparency to the still blue of the heavenly dome; and finally, scattered through all, is the fiercer element of Fire, here tonguing over the earth wherever it may be kindled, there flashing through the ether, and, high over all, as natural vision fancies, collected permanently into points and orbs. Moreover, this distribution of external nature by the eye sinks inward into the mind, becomes a mode of universal thought, and affects our language respecting mind itself. Some souls, solid and strong, seem to have an affinity with the earth; some, more fluid, with the water; some, soft and supersubtle, with the air; some, hot and terrible, with the fires and the lightnings; while some there are—earthy-fiery, fiery-aerial, and the like—whose affinities must be represented as compound. Nay, more, it will be found that the element to which any mind is referred by those observing its operations, is also generally

that for the sensible circumstance of which it shows, in its fancies, a marked affection. Shelley might be classed as an aerial spirit with a touch of fainter fire; and the circumstance with which Shelley's poetry abounds is that of Meteorology.

So much for the word "elemental" as it might be afforded to us out of the obsolete, but still significant, doctrine of the Four Elements. But we need not associate the word with any such doctrine. The elemental in nature or in life may be defined as consisting simply of those objects or phenomena in each which are recognised as most large, comprehensive, primitive, impressive, and enduring. There is an elemental of the physical world, and there is an elemental of the moral world. The elemental in the physical world consists of the more massive and enduring phenomena of that world, of those larger sights and sounds of nature that impressed men primevally, and that continue to impress powerfully now—the wide expanse of earth, barren with moor or waving with corn and forest; the sea restless to the horizon, and rolling its waves to the beach; the gusts of the raging tempest; the sun majestic in the heavens, and the nocturnal glory of the stars; the clouds, the rains, the rocks, the vales, the mountains. To these more massive and permanent

objects or phenomena of the physical world there correspond objects or phenomena of the moral world, distinguished from the rest as also more massive and enduring. Birth, Life, Death; Labour, Sorrow, Love, Revenge; the thought of the Whence, the thought of the Why, the thought of the Whither—these, in the moral world, are the considerations that are elemental. Men of old revolved them; we revolve them; those who come after us will revolve them. As in the physical world there are infinite myriads of phenomena, complex and minute, aggregated on the basis of the elemental and into which the elemental may be decomposed, so on these fundamental feelings, facts, and thoughts of the moral world are all the minuter facts of social experience piled, and over these as their basis they roll in varying whirl. These are the generalities; the rest are the minutiæ. Now to the hundred definitions that have been given of genius, let this one more be added—that that soul is a soul of genius which is in affinity with the elemental in nature and in life, and which, by the necessity of its constitution, tends always from the midst of the complex and minute to the simple and the general.

I know not where the difference between the purest form of the passion for the elemental on the

one hand, and the most prurient form of affection for mean social detail on the other is better represented than in the contrast between the Archangels and Mephistopheles in the Prologue to Goethe's "Faust." The Prologue opens with a hymn of the three Archangels, singing, first severally and then together, before the throne of Deity:—

"RAPHAEL.

In chorus with each kindred star
The Sun sends forth his ancient song,
And on his path prescribed from far,
In thunder going, rolls along:
The Angels gather strength, beholding,
Though none their substance fathom may;
The mystic works of Thy upholding
Are lordly as on Time's first day.

GABRIEL.

And swift and swift, all thought outstripping,
Wheels round the pomp of Earth in sight,
Its daily gleam of Eden dipping
In deep and horror-teeming night:
The sea, in mighty billows dashing,
Up-foams against the rock's deep base;
And rock and sea, together crashing,
Whirl ceaseless in the starry race.

MICHAEL.

And loud storms roar, their warfare waging
From sea to land, from land to sea;
And fashion round it, in their raging,
A girdle woven wondrously:

There flames the flash of desolation,
To clear the coming thunder's way:
Yet, Lord, *we* have in veneration
The gentle going of thy day.

THE THREE.

The Angels gather strength, beholding,
Though none Thy substance fathom may;
And all the works of Thy upholding
Are lordly as on Time's first day."

As the song ends, Mephistopheles comes forward; and mark, in contrast, the tenor of *his* speech:—

" Of suns and worlds deuce one word can *I* gabble;
I only know how men grow miserable.
The little god of earth is still the same old clay,
And is as odd this hour as on Creation's day.
Better somewhat his situation,
Hadst Thou not given him that same light of inspiration:
Reason he calls 't, and uses 't so that he
Grows but more beastly than the very beasts to be.
He seems to me, begging your Grace's pardon,
Like one of those long-legg'd things in a garden,
That fly about, and hop and spring,
And in the grass the same old chirrup sing.
Would I could say that here the story closes!
But in all sorts of dirt they thrust their noses."

These are the two moods. They reproduce themselves in literature. In all the greater literature of the world, from Homer and the Greek Drama downwards, there is heard the tone of the Elemental song. Nor need it be absent in our Prose Fiction.

No more than our metrical Poetry must this form of literature be permitted to degenerate into a ceaseless variation of the speech of Mephistopheles, that men are as miserable as ever and that the world is all in a mess. It may be that the representation of social reality is, on the whole, the proper business of the Novel; but even in the representation of social reality the spirit may be that of the far-surveying and the sublime. I believe, however, that there may be vindicated for the literature of prose phantasy the liberty of an order of fiction different from the usual Novel of Social Reality, and approaching more to what has always been allowed in metrical poesy, and that, accordingly, those occasional prose fictions are to be welcomed which deal with characters of heroic imaginary mould, and which remove us from cities and the crowded haunts of men.

THE END.

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